

# Questions & Answers about Water Testing

## **What has been the historical procedure for testing water in CPS buildings for lead?**

Each year, CPS has worked with the Cambridge Water Department to test drinking water in our buildings for the presence of lead. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines the Action Level for lead testing (the point at which action must be taken) at 15 parts per billion (15 micrograms per liter or .015 milligrams per liter). For ten years, all tests were well within the standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), except for a handful of drinking water fountains/bubblers at the high school. When these bubblers were found to exceed the action level, they were replaced and no further problems have been found.

## **Why was the decision made to test all faucets and taps in CPS schools this year?**

This decision reflects increased awareness about the issue of lead in water, as well as increasing awareness of tap water as preferable to bottled water for a variety of health and environmental reasons.

## **Is lead in drinking water generally a concern in CPS buildings?**

No. The results of the last 10 years of testing show that drinking water in CPS buildings is generally safe. Our comprehensive testing has shown scattered taps that need to be replaced, but continues to reinforce the overall high quality of drinking water in Cambridge and CPS.

## **When was the comprehensive lead testing conducted?**

During the last 2 weeks of the 2015-16 school year, water samples were drawn from all taps at all school buildings, except for the recently-renovated Cambridge Rindge and Latin high school building and the newly-constructed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. / Putnam Avenue Upper School building. These two schools will be tested in September.

## **What was the testing procedure?**

Working under the supervision of the Cambridge Water Department's lab staff, a member of the CPS Facilities department was instructed in how to take an appropriate sample from each tap. All samples were

drawn first thing in the morning, to ensure that water had been standing in pipes for at least 12 hours. A strict chain of custody was followed during the transfer process from CPS to the Cambridge Water Department.

## **Now that testing has occurred, what is the likely source of the lead levels in some taps?**

Because we know that the water inside of our buildings meets EPA standards, it's most likely that lead is leeching into the water from older faucets and fixtures. Many older faucets were allowed to contain brass components. Brass is an alloy—a mixture of metals—which can include copper, zinc and lead. Therefore, the most likely culprit is this older hardware.

## **Are the impacted faucets/drinking water fountains/taps still in use?**

No. All taps that tested at or above 15 parts per billion have been removed from service and will remain out of service until the fixtures are replaced and the taps are re-tested to ensure water is within EPA guidelines.

## **What if replacing the fixtures does not solve the problem?**

If water continues to exceed the Action Level on further testing, the building's water supply infrastructure will be tested until the source of the lead has been eliminated. Fixtures will remain out of service until testing indicates that EPA standards have been achieved.

## **Will all impacted faucets/taps be back in service by the start of school?**

That is the goal. If we are unable to meet this deadline, we will take steps to ensure that all students and staff have adequate access to drinking water.

## **What steps will be taken to ensure that all faucets and water fountains remain within EPA standards?**

A more comprehensive testing program is being developed to monitor all taps on an ongoing basis. The program will be presented to the School Committee later this fall.

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