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Dangerous legacy: Complete replacement of lead water pipes now

Water containing lead not suitable for infants, toddlers, and pregnant mothers

It has been known for years that lead is harmful to health, yet water pipes made of lead are still widespread in many older buildings. The result can be increased lead concentrations in drinking water, in some cases above the limit value of 10 microgrammes lead/litre of drinking water ($\leftrightarrow$ g/L) in effect as of 2013. There is evidence that roughly 3 percent of households with children aged 3-14 will not comply with this cap in future, as recently shown in the Federal Environment Agency's (UBA) Kinder-Umwelt-Survey [Children Environment Survey]. Infants and toddlers are highly sensitive to lead, and therefore drinking water from lead pipes is not suitable for the preparation of their food. Pregnant mothers should not consume it either, whether the water has been stagnant in pipes for long periods of time or is fresh from the tap. Harmful effects to health can be reliably avoided if old pipes in buildings are replaced with those made of certified materials. More suitable materials are plastics, stainless steel or copper certified by the DVGW German Technical and Scientific Association for Gas and Water. UBA President Prof. Dr. Andreas Troge announced, "The upcoming remedial work to achieve improved heat insulation provides a good opportunity to eliminate lead from old buildings once and for all". A free UBA brochure (in German) provides tips and advice: *Trink was - Trinkwasser aus dem Hahn* [Drinking water from the tap].

Property owners should seek advice from expert plumbing companies, who are bound to observe generally accepted technical rules and standards and select appropriate materials. UBA experience has proven that cutting costs does not pay, for improper installation or uncertified materials can introduce other pollutants into drinking water or promote bacterial growth.

Water pipes must also be adapted to local water conditions, as drinking water is a natural products and its chemical or corrosive properties vary from region to region. Restrictions on the use of copper piping must be taken into account prior to installation, for elevated concentrations in drinking water can result if water is acidic or hard. Local water works keep

lists of competent plumbing companies who receive regular training and education as concerns local water composition. Property owners can thus tailor their selection of materials to the drinking water on site.

In some regions of Germany, especially the north and east, lead pipes were still being installed up until the early 1970s. Neither the cap on lead in drinking water currently in effect until 30 November 2013 (25 $\rightarrow$ g/l) nor the new cap in effect as of 1 December 2013 (10 $\rightarrow$ g/l) can be complied with everywhere. Since lead pipes are very durable and complete renewal is a costly venture, many property owners have procrastinated on the issue. However, the old lead pipes must be removed entirely to effectively reduce lead contamination. UBA urgently advises against partial replacement, and President Troge adds, "The mixture of various metals can cause significantly high contamination by dissolved metals in drinking water".

The UBA brochure *Trink was - Trinkwasser aus dem Hahn* advises tenants and property owners how to identify faulty installation and use of unsuitable plumbing materials. The brochure is available for download at <http://www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/3058.pdf>.

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