

Frequently Asked Questions on USVI Drinking Water

Does the EPA have any additional information about the lead and copper levels in water on St. Croix? Can you share the sampling results?

Of 66 samples taken, 35 exceeded EPA's lead action level of 15 parts per billion (ppb) - a level that requires follow up actions. Several samples exceeded the copper health-based standard of 1300 ppb. At 31 sites where samples revealed very high levels of lead, and after flushing the water for 3 to 5 minutes, the levels fell to below EPA's action level. However, two sites had samples that exceeded EPA action levels even after flushing.

What are the possible health effects?

There is no safe level of lead. Lead is a toxic metal that can cause damage to a child's ability to learn and a range of health damage in adults. Lead exposure can have serious, long-term health consequences in adults and children. Even at low levels, lead in children can cause I.Q. deficiencies, reading and learning disabilities, impaired hearing, reduced attention spans, hyperactivity and other behavioral problems. Lead exposure can also cause health problems in pregnant women and harm fetuses.

Copper is an essential nutrient, but some people who drink water containing copper in excess of the action level over a relatively short amount of time could experience gastrointestinal distress. Some people who drink water containing copper in excess of the action level over many years could suffer liver or kidney damage.

What is flushing and can it remove lead in UVS's system?

Flushing means that you run water long enough to assure that the water in household plumbing and service lines is flushed through your faucet before you use the water for drinking or cooking. Flushing or running the tap has been shown to reduce the levels of lead in drinking water that has sat in the pipes and plumbing for an extended period of time because it clears out the water that has been in contact with the lead components before a resident uses the water.

When did EPA provide the sampling results to the USVI Government?

EPA and the University of the Virgin Islands helped collect drinking water samples and EPA analyzed these samples for metals. On Friday, October 13, 2023, EPA notified the Virgin Islands

Water and Power Authority, the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), and the Department of Health about these sampling results.

How did EPA find the elevated lead and copper levels?

At the request of the U.S. Virgin Islands government, EPA participated in joint sampling of the drinking water in multiple locations on St. Croix, USVI, in response to reports of red and brown discoloration in the water and to assess any potential risks to public health. Through this recent targeted testing, EPA analysis discovered very elevated levels of lead and copper in some samples collected at distribution meters. EPA is strongly recommending that people not consume this water until more information is gathered.

EPA is actively working with the USVI government on next steps, which include further sampling. In the meantime, the U.S. Virgin Islands Water & Power Authority (WAPA) is contacting customers impacted by the elevated lead and copper levels.

EPA will continue to work closely with the USVI government to ensure that all communities are protected from any potential contamination in drinking water.

Updated on: 10/17/23