# Section 5
# Public Education

In addition to testing for lead and solving any contamination problems, a lead control program should also include a public education component. This section discusses the mandatory public notice requirements for reporting lead test results under the Lead Contamination Control Act (LCCA) and discusses the importance of developing an overall communication strategy. Finally, helpful communication hints are provided along with sample public notice materials.

### Mandatory Public Notice Requirements Under the LCCA

Schools conducting a lead-in-drinking-water sampling program *must* comply with the public availability requirements of the Lead Contamination Control Act. There are two separate public availability requirements with which schools must comply:

(1) You must make available—in your administrative offices—a copy of the sampling results "for inspection by the public, including teachers, other school personnel, and parents."

(2) You must also notify relevant parent, teacher, and employee organizations of the availability of your sampling program results.

*Given the health effects of lead, EPA advocates that any facility conducting sampling for lead make public any test results. In addition, such facilities should identify activities they are pursuing to correct any lead problems found.*

*Special Note:* Facilities regulated as public water systems must comply with significant additional regulatory, reporting, and public notice requirements as stipulated by the Safe Drinking Water Act and EPA's National Primary Drinking Water Regulation for Lead. Facilities that provide public drinking water should already be aware of their public notice responsibilities with respect to lead. Consult your State drinking water program with any questions *(see Appendix A)*.

There are five basic public notification methods that—used alone or in various combinations—can be applied to communicate lead-in-drinking-water issues/problems and the meaning and significance of your sampling program results. These methods are not new, but are commonly employed by businesses and schools.

Choose the method that best suits your particular situation and/or protocol. Remember, you should not provide sampling program results to the public without also providing a basis for interpreting and understanding the significance of those results. This will create certain confusion and make your communication efforts much more difficult than necessary.

**Press Release:** A press release in the local newspaper can potentially inform a broad range of the local public of lead-in-drinking-water issues and the results of your sampling program. It is important that the release inform readers of how to obtain the sampling results and other lead-in-drinking-water information and perhaps even include the phone number of an informed and available facility official.

**Follow-up Letters/Fliers:** Letters or fliers represent the most direct and effective method of communicating lead-in-drinking-water activities to parents/guardians and other members of your school or building community. The letters and fliers should be mailed directly using any existing address lists.

**Mailbox or Paycheck Stuffers:** Mailbox and paycheck stuffers represent the most direct and effective method of communicating lead-in-drinking-water activities to employees such as teachers and business personnel. Stuffers would contain much the same information as that contained in a press release or letter/flier.

**Staff Newsletter:** A notice contained in a staff newsletter is a further option for directly and effectively communicating information about the lead program to employees.

**Presentations:** Providing lead sampling program briefings and presentations at facility-related meetings is yet another effective means of communication. Relevant events for schools include meetings of parent-teacher organizations, faculty, and the school board. Staff meetings might represent one option for presenting lead testing program information to members of a non-residential building.

### The Components of an Effective General Communication Strategy

Lead in drinking water can be an emotional and sensitive issue, especially for parents who are concerned about their children's safety. As a result, you should not view communication and outreach activities as stand-alone or final efforts, but rather as a part of an *overall* or *general* communication strategy.

The purpose of a general communication strategy is to provide the means for addressing questions from members of your facility's community and also to provide ongoing, up-to-date information regarding your sampling efforts. *Ideally, you should designate a single spokesperson or special task force to interact with the public since it is important that your message remain consistent.*

The issues to be addressed as part of a communication strategy include:

- Participants
- Timing for delivery
- Contents of the message
- Methods and manner of communication.

#### Participants

Overall, there are four primary players or interests involved in the control of lead in drinking water:

**States and EPA Regions:** Both State drinking water programs and EPA Regional offices are responsible for ensuring that public water systems comply with the National Primary Drinking Water Regulation for lead and any additional or more stringent State standards. States are also responsible for assisting schools in implementing lead-in-drinking-water control programs.

**Drinking Water Community:** Public water systems comprise the regulated drinking water community, and they are responsible for complying with all national and State drinking water standards for lead. This means that they must ensure that the water they deliver is non-corrosive, contains minimal amounts of lead, and will not result in significant lead-leaching from plumbing in individual homes and buildings.

**Local Community:** The local community consists of those users of the facility who would be most affected by lead-in-drinking-water problems (i.e., business professionals, students, parents, school boards, teachers, and other employees). Members of the local community should be the primary targets of any general communication activities.

**Larger Community:** The local and regional media can serve as a conduit for information reaching a larger local community. It is important that you be prepared to generate accurate news releases. Also, your spokesperson or task force should be prepared to respond to interview requests with accurate and consistent information.

#### Timing

The timing of your communication activities is very important. Whenever public health risks are involved, public communication efforts are less complicated and generate less conflict if those potentially affected are notified in advance of important issues and events. At a minimum, you should provide information to members of the building community and the larger community (if deemed necessary) at the following three times.

- Before your lead-in-drinking-water sampling program begins.
- In response to periodic interest and/or pressure.
- After you obtain the results of testing and/or decide upon corrective measures.

### Contents

Your communication messages should consist of the following information:

- Details about the nature of your drinking water lead control program.
- The results of your sampling program and your plans for correcting any identified problems.
- Information on the public health effects and risks posed by lead in drinking water and the significance of lead in drinking water versus other sources such as food and air.
- The availability of general lead-in-drinking-water information resources and the availability of the detailed sampling results for your facility.

### Methods

The communication methods that can be used for your general communication strategy are largely the same as those described earlier in regard to mandatory notification methods and, thus, need not differ from communication activities common to school or non-residential building operations (i.e., meeting presentations, press releases, mailbox/paycheck stuffers, and letters to staff and parents).

Additional methods unique to your lead control program may include:

- Creating an information center located at a convenient place in the facility such as a library or break room.
- Creating a task force with representatives from the building community.
- Making available a list of laboratories that are State-certified to test home water for lead and other contaminants.
- (For schools) encouraging classroom science activities that focus on drinking water quality. *(Contact EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline—see Appendix D—for information on organizations that have such science activities).*

### Helpful Hints for Communication

The following list contains some hints for effective communication:

- Take the initiative in providing information to your community (it is important to do so before the media does it for you). When public health risks are involved, especially with respect to children, vague or incorrect information can be worse than no information at all.
- Be a good and reliable source of information. That is, provide honest, accurate, and comprehensive information in every necessary area.
- Always speak with one voice (i.e., designate points of contact—preferably one person—to respond to parents and the media).
- Anticipate likely questions from members of the building community (e.g., employees, parents, teachers, students, members of civic organizations, media representatives). Each member of the community is likely to have a different concern and/or viewpoint on the subject of lead testing.
- Be positive, proactive, and forthcoming when working with the media. If you work together in a cordial manner, your communication efforts are likely to be less complex.
- Keep members of the building community up-to-date as important events and information on your lead testing program unfold.

### Sample Public Notice Materials

Exhibit 14 contains a sample public notification letter that could be used and adapted to communicate lead testing information. Exhibit 15 is a sample press release for local media that could also be used or adapted.

**Exhibit 14** Sample Public Notice Letter

Spring 1994

Anytown School Department
Anytown, USA 00000-0000

Dear Members of the Anytown School Community:

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined that lead in drinking water is a health concern at certain levels of exposure. The groups most vulnerable to lead include fetuses and young children. Lead in pregnant women can damage a child before it is born, by lowering birth weight and slowing down normal physical and mental development. Lead in young children, especially those under the age of six, can result in lower IQ levels, impaired hearing, reduced attention span, and poor classroom performance. At high levels, lead can seriously damage the brain.

As a result of these health effects, EPA has applied more stringent regulations to public water systems. However, since lead is generally contributed to water via plumbing in individual homes and businesses, EPA has also advocated testing of water in private buildings. EPA recommends that action be taken if lead levels exceed 20 parts per billion (ppb) at any outlet tested.

In October 1988, the U.S. Congress passed the Lead Contamination Control Act, which specifically addressed the problem of lead in school drinking water. Following instructions given in an EPA guidance document especially designed for schools, we completed a plumbing profile for each of the buildings within the Anytown School District. Through this effort, we identified and tested those drinking water outlets most likely to have high levels of lead. Of the ___ samples taken, all but ___ tested well below EPA's recommended level of 20 ppb for lead.

The first contaminated outlet was a drinking water fountain (bubbler) at Kennedy High School. After follow-up testing was conducted, it was determined that the faucet (bubbler head) was the source of the lead contamination. The faucet was replaced with a lead-free faucet and retested. Follow-up test results revealed lead levels well below EPA's recommended level.

The second outlet, in the Lincoln Elementary School, was a faucet in the kitchen and showed unacceptable lead levels in both initial and follow-up testing. We found the source of the lead contamination to be the pipe providing water to the faucet. This pipe was replaced with lead-free materials.

A copy of the test results is available in our central office for inspection by the public, including teachers, other school personnel, and parents and can be viewed between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. For more information about water quality in our schools, contact John Doe at the Anytown School Department, 555-2223. For information about water quality in your home or for questions about testing, contact Jane Smith at the Anytown Water Department, 555-1217.

Sincerely,

Fred Frank
Superintendent of Schools

Exhibit 15 Sample Press Release for Local Media

Anytown School Department
One School Street
Anytown, USA 00000-0000
Contact: Fred Frank, Superintendent

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**News Release**

**Lead Levels in School Drinking Water Meet Federal Guidelines**

Anytown, USA, April xx, 1994... The Anytown School Department announced today that recent tests of drinking water in the town's schools indicate that lead levels meet Federal guidelines. Although the testing program detected lead at two drinking water outlets at one elementary and one senior high school, lead levels were reduced following replacement of these outlets.

In making the announcement, School Superintendent Fred Frank stated, "We are pleased that the testing program has verified that lead is not a problem in our school drinking water."

The School Department conducted the testing program to make sure that drinking water in the school system is safe for children and school staff. Water with high lead levels can contribute to negative health effects, especially in young children.

The testing was conducted in January by school personnel following Federal and State guidelines. Samples from various locations in each of the schools were sent to a State-certified laboratory for analysis. The laboratory results were received by the School Department last week.

Information about the lead testing program, including the laboratory results, can be found at the School Department office at the above address, weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

**STOP**