

District Water Information

In 2016 the Ministry of Education mandated lead testing in schools built before 1990. With guidance from the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, the Powell River School District completed this testing in 2016 and with the support of a Ministry of Education grant, has since been able to implement a number of mitigation strategies at affected schools.

In general, drinking water supply systems in B.C. have very low levels of lead. However, many water systems in the South Coast of B.C. have soft (low in hardness), and slightly acidic (low pH and alkalinity) drinking water. When this type of water sits unused in building piping, such as overnight or over weekends, lead can be released from the plumbing into the water. However, when the system becomes active and the standing water is flushed from the system, the quality improves.

The test results recently reported in the media were intentionally taken first thing in the morning prior to flushing the system. A second result was taken immediately after the system was flushed, and in each case the levels were consistent with Health Canada recommendations. It is this second sample that is indicative of what is being consumed. Since 2017, water samples continue to be collected on a rotating 3-year basis, with test results conducted and reported by an independent contractor. The school district shares these results with the Ministry of Education and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority.

In March 2019, Health Canada lowered the maximum acceptable concentration of lead in drinking water from 0.010 mg/L to 0.005 mg/L. When annual testing is done later this school year, the results will be measured against these new guidelines.

Buildings, including schools, that are typically affected are those built before 1989; for the Powell River School District that would include James Thomson Elementary, Henderson Elementary, Edgehill Elementary, Oceanview Education Centre, Kelly Creek Community School and Texada Elementary. Mitigation efforts implemented at these sites, apart from the daily flushing of the systems, are a combination of installing new fixtures and drinking fountains throughout the district, installation of new water lines, installation of NSF certified lead filtration systems, the removal of classroom fountain bubblers that weren't easily remediated, and where needed, the placement of relevant signage.

The Powell River School Board takes the health and welfare of its students and staff very seriously, and will continue to test water quality consistent with Ministry of Education policies and guidelines, as well will continue to explore ways to improve its infrastructure.