

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
INFORMATION BULLETS**

**DATE:** September 20, 2018

**CLIFF #:** 205306

**PREPARED FOR:** Minister's Office for information

**SUBJECT:** Water Quality in School Districts

**BULLETS:**

- 2015/2016 - EDUC began receiving enquiries from media, general public and school districts re: lead in drinking water issues at select schools around the province.
- February 24, 2016 (Ref# 186335) – EDUC issued a letter to all school districts at the request of the Provincial Health Officer reminding them of importance of ensuring water quality within all schools complies with Water Management Best Practices and the *Drinking Water Protection Act*.
- September 26, 2016 (Ref#190736) – EDUC issued a letter to all school districts regarding a new *Policy for Testing Lead Content in Drinking Water of School Facilities* and directed school districts to consult with their Regional Health Authority to develop a water quality testing program for their school facilities that would identify the following: risk assessment, water testing, communication plan, and mitigation strategy requirements.
- The policy identified that school districts are responsible for ensuring the quality of water within their drinking water systems, and must take reasonable steps to resolve elevated lead levels that are outside maximum acceptable concentrations for Lead (>0.01mg/L), as stated from the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality by Health Canada.
- School districts were mandated to complete lead-content testing for all their school facilities once every 3 years, with a minimum testing of 1/3 of the school facilities within their inventory each year.
- Annual lead in water testing submission deadlines were/are March 30 2017, March 30 2018, and March 30 2019, at which time all school facilities in the province will have testing completed.
- School districts may utilize Annual Facilities Grant (AFG) and School Enhancement Program (SEP) funding to cover costs associated with the testing and remediation of issues associated with elevated lead levels in drinking water at school facilities.
- The **March 30, 2017** and **March 30, 2018** reporting indicates that all 60 school districts in the Province have conducted some level of testing of schools in their jurisdictions.
- To date, 1,132 out of an approximate 1,602 schools (or 71%) in the province have been tested with 4,772 out of 20,079 separate water sources (or 24%) having lead levels exceeding maximum allowable limits.
- In discussions with school districts, all known water sources having lead levels exceeding maximum allowable limits are being addressed with mitigation solutions such as: decommissioning/removing the water source, implementing a flushing schedule, provision of bottled water, installation of water filtration system, replace plumbing.

- The **March 30, 2019** reports are yet to be completed, which EDUC anticipates will provide testing results for the balance of schools in the province (approximately 420 schools).
- The following table summarizes the **March 30, 2017** and **March 30, 2018** testing results on a school district by school district level:

<b>Lead in Water Testing Results (Summarizing March 30, 2017 and March 30, 2018 Reporting to EDUC)</b>							
SD#	SD Name	# of Schools in School District (Active & Closed)	# of Schools Tested	% of Schools Tested	# of Fixtures Tested	# of Fixtures Tested Exceeding Limit	% of Fixtures Tested Exceeding Limit
5	Southeast Kootenay	21	6	29%	21	0	0%
6	Rocky Mountain	23	17	74%	23	0	0%
8	Kootenay Lake	26	22	85%	143	68	48%
10	Arrow Lakes	6	6	100%	11	1	9%
19	Revelstoke	7	5	71%	5	0	0%
20	Kootenay Columbia	15	11	73%	48	0	0%
22	Vernon	21	21	100%	90	49	54%
23	Central Okanagan	49	41	84%	80	16	20%
27	Cariboo-Chilcotin	33	11	33%	47	0	0%
28	Quesnel	17	9	53%	37	2	5%
33	Chilliwack	33	28	85%	106	7	7%
34	Abbotsford	47	27	57%	188	0	0%
35	Langley	43	30	70%	96	11	11%
36	Surrey	126	64	51%	11380	2917	26%
37	Delta	31	33	106%	600	54	9%
38	Richmond	51	42	82%	2063	756	37%
39	Vancouver	114	88	77%	619	21	3%
40	New Westminster	13	8	62%	45	9	20%
41	Burnaby	54	49	91%	297	2	1%
	Maple Ridge - Pitt Meadows						
42	Meadows	32	28	88%	70	10	14%
43	Coquitlam	79	33	42%	113	2	2%
44	North Vancouver	42	32	76%	64	0	0%
45	West Vancouver	18	17	94%	34	0	0%
46	Sunshine Coast	14	13	93%	14	0	0%
47	Powell River	8	6	75%	36	3	8%
48	Sea to Sky	15	10	67%	10	0	0%
49	Central Coast	4	5	125%	15	0	0%
50	Haida Gwaii	6	6	100%	12	0	0%
51	Boundary	10	4	40%	8	1	13%

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
INFORMATION BULLETS**

52	Prince Rupert	11	8	73%	74	4	5%
53	Okanagan Similkameen	10	6	60%	13	0	0%
54	Bulkley Valley	8	6	75%	8	0	0%
57	Prince George	50	24	48%	314	35	11%
58	Nicola-Similkameen	14	9	64%	40	0	0%
59	Peace River South	22	19	86%	46	1	2%
60	Peace River North	19	22	116%	57	4	7%
61	Greater Victoria	53	46	87%	589	304	52%
62	Sooke	25	19	76%	40	0	0%
63	Saanich	22	11	50%	163	1	1%
64	Gulf Islands	11	10	91%	139	14	10%
67	Okanagan Skaha	21	21	100%	21	5	24%
68	Nanaimo-Ladysmith	42	21	50%	642	199	31%
69	Qualicum	12	6	50%	43	2	5%
70	Alberni	15	1	7%	16	2	13%
71	Comox Valley	23	11	48%	20	6	30%
72	Campbell River	21	20	95%	122	24	20%
73	Kamloops/Thompson	58	41	71%	264	49	19%
74	Gold Trail	12	8	67%	8	0	0%
75	Mission	23	13	57%	149	53	36%
78	Fraser-Cascade	9	9	100%	10	0	0%
79	Cowichan Valley	28	21	75%	246	0	0%
81	Fort Nelson	5	4	80%	8	0	0%
82	Coast Mountains	31	22	71%	32	5	16%
83	North Okanagan-Shuswap	27	13	48%	230	49	21%
84	Vancouver Island West	6	3	50%	15	0	0%
85	Vancouver Island North	17	13	76%	173	11	6%
87	Stikine	5	4	80%	4	0	0%
91	Nechako Lakes	21	18	86%	72	7	10%
92	Nisga'a	4	4	100%	6	0	0%
93	Conseil Scolaire Francophone	19	27	142%	240	68	28%
<b>Total</b>		<b>1602</b>	<b>1132</b>		<b>20079</b>	<b>4772</b>	

## ADVICE TO MINISTER

<p><b>CONFIDENTIAL ISSUES NOTE</b></p> <p>Ministry of Education</p> <p>Date: Dec. 20, 2017</p> <p>Reviewed: June 10, 2019</p> <p>Minister Responsible: Rob Fleming</p>	<p><b>Water Quality and Lead</b></p>
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### ADVICE AND RECOMMENDED RESPONSE:

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Page 5 of 7

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## ADVICE TO MINISTER

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### BACKGROUND:

On June 12, 2019, the Provincial Health Officer's report "Clean, Safe, and Reliable Drinking Water: An Update on Drinking Water Protection in BC and the Action Plan for Safe Drinking Water in British Columbia" will be released. The report covers 2012/13 – 2016/17 and offers 32 recommendations to further advance the protection of drinking water across BC. The Ministry of Education is named as a co-Lead in **one** of the recommendations relating to lead in drinking water in schools

**Recommendation 19: Lead in Drinking Water 19a. (Schools):** *Establish a consistent sampling and reporting protocol for lead in drinking water for schools to follow. Continue to develop plans to implement measures to effectively reduce lead in school drinking water. Leads: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and the regional health authorities.*

The Ministry has already instituted actions related to the recommendation. The test results in the report were released publicly two years ago. All water sources in the report above the maximum levels of lead would have been mitigated.

Water testing results from Jan. 1, 2019 to May 21, 2019 will be published likely in July in response to an information request. They are otherwise not publicly posted.

In Spring 2019, a FOI request was published that consisted of results that were submitted for March 2018. These results are not new and have already been scrutinized in previous media reports.

In March 2019, Health Canada lowered the maximum acceptable concentrations of lead by approximately half. This may mean some districts will be re-testing facilities that were over the new acceptable levels. In March 2019, districts submitted their latest sample results including mitigation actions and strategies (these results are not public yet). The most significant change is the reduction of the maximum allowable concentration (MAC) of lead in drinking water, from 0.01 mg/L (set in 1992) to 0.005 mg/L.

In fall 2018, a story ran in the Times Colonist about the Victoria school districts decision to install new water fountains with filters in every school. The district began removing older fountains in January and completed the project over the summer, installing 47 new fountains and 63 bottle fillers.

On Sept. 26, 2016, the Ministry of Education issued a new policy on testing school drinking water for lead content. Under this policy, districts are also required to report annual water testing results to the Ministry.

### Mitigation examples:

#### SD61 (Greater Victoria)

- 2/3 of schools in district had water sources tested in 2016 and 2017, with the remaining 1/3 being tested throughout 2018.
- Approximately 30% of water sources exceeded maximum allowable levels.
- School district either installed new bottle-filler stations, replaced fixtures with filtered systems or instituted a flushing program for fixtures with signage posted.
- All affected schools (of the 2/3 tested) have been mitigated.

#### SD63 (Saanich)

- All schools in district had water sources tested in 2016 and 2017.
- Approximately 50% of water sources exceeded maximum allowable levels.
- All affected schools have been mitigated.

#### Examples of positive tests and mitigation steps:

- SD 28 Quesnel – Dragon Lake Elementary – Sink in kindergarten classroom had lead level of 0.0130 mg/L – Replaced water piping to affected sink.
- SD 35 Langley – Uplands Elementary – Drinking fountain in common hallway by staff room had lead level of 0.020 mg/L – Removed affected drinking fountain and replaced with new drinking fountain that has lead filtering system installed.
- SD Surrey – Panorama Park Elementary – Sink in staff women's washroom had lead level of 0.016 mg/L - Removed affected drinking fountain and replaced with new drinking fountain that has lead filtering system installed.

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