

# Sunset Sampling Water Again After Lead Content Comes In High

BY SUSAN USHER

You can't see it, taste it or smell it, but there could be lead in your drinking water, perhaps more than is safe to drink over time.

But don't panic; the problem can be remedied. That's the double message Larry Crim, director of public utilities at Sunset Beach, is sharing with town homeowners and renters this week.

"Everything was fine the first six months of testing," said Crim, "but in the second six months we had three households over the limit on lead. Two were real high and one was slightly elevated."

Since July 1, 1993, public water systems have been required to sample for lead and copper contaminants. Sunset Beach has 20 regular sampling sites and 20 back-up sites, all homes built between 1982 and 1987, plumbed with copper and having lead solder, and with no point-of-use filter system.

Residents take the samples themselves, removing the strainer from the kitchen faucet, flushing the system well with running water, and then letting the water stand in the pipes at least six hours or overnight before taking the sample.

In the last round of tests, three homes exceeded the EPA's standard of 15 parts of lead per billion.

When that happens, said Crim, federal regulations

require that the town resample at homes and do additional testing at street-side to check that there is no problem with the town's part of the system, that the lead is only coming from within the residential plumbing.

"We don't have any lead in our system," said Crim, "so it has to be on the homeowner's side." The homeowner's side includes the service line leading from the meter to the house and the plumbing that serves the house.

The town is also required to educate its 2,350 to 2,400 water customers on the potential hazards of lead in drinking water, and what they can do about it.

Lead enters drinking water primarily as a result of corrosion, or wearing away, of materials containing lead, such as lead-based solder used to join copper pipe, brass and chrome-plated brass faucets, and in some cases, pipes made of lead that connect the house to the town's water main.

When water stands for several hours in lead pipes or in plumbing systems containing lead, the lead may dissolve into the drinking water. That means the first water drawn from the tap in the morning, or in the afternoon on return from school or work, can contain fairly high levels of lead.

Lead in drinking water rarely is the sole cause of lead poisoning but can make up 20 percent or more of a

person's total exposure to lead, according to the EPA, especially for infants who drink formula or juice concentrates mixed with water.

If too much lead gets in someone's body, it poses a significant health risk, particularly to young children and pregnant women.

Lead builds up in the body over time and can cause damage to the brain, red blood cells and kidneys. Amounts of lead that won't hurt adults can slow down normal mental and physical development of growing bodies.

Other sources of lead that children routinely come in contact with include dust and dirt, which makes it important to wash their hands and toys often and to try to make sure they only put food in their mouths.

When a home has elevated lead levels in its drinking water supply there are steps that can be taken to reduce exposure, according to Crim.

These include:

- using water from the cold water tap for drinking and cooking, instead of the hot water tap;

- periodically flushing the lines (remove strainer, run water 3 to 5 minutes) to remove loose lead solder and debris from plumbing materials installed in new homes or homes in which the plumbing has been replaced recently;

- check to see if your copper pipes are joined with lead solder that has been installed illegally since it was banned in 1986. If so, notify the plumber and ask that the lead solder be replaced with lead-free solder. Lead solder looks dull gray and when scratched with a key looks shiny.

- contact the plumbing contractor that installed your system or hire a licensed plumber to see if the service line that leads from the public water main to your residence is made of lead. If so, you'll need to have the line replaced with copper, steel iron or plastic pipe.

- have an electrician check your home's wiring. If grounding wires are attached to the pipes, it could increase corrosion. Find out if the wiring can be grounded elsewhere; don't try to change it yourself.

More extreme options include purchasing or leasing a home filtration/treatment device that removes lead or purchasing bottled water for drinking and cooking.

Contact the county health department (253-4381) or state public water supply section (919-733-2321) if lead solder was illegally installed in your home, or to find out more about the health effects of lead and how to have a child's blood tested for the presence of lead.

Sunset Beach Town Hall has building permit records that could list the plumbing contractor that plumbed a particular home.

# Pickets Must Go Back Up On Porches

BY SUSAN USHER

Why not rip out the pickets across the front of your beach house porch, install a screen to keep out the bugs, sit back and enjoy the breeze and an improved view?

Ask Sunset Beach Building Inspector Dan Cordell: It may be an increasingly popular to remove the railing, but it violates state building code. It's a safety hazard, especially for unsuspecting children.

Cordell believes most property owners aren't aware of either problem when they rip the pickets from their porches, especially when they look up the street and a neighbor's done the same thing.

"Legally I can post a condemnation notice," he said, and that's what he's doing, though he had hoped town council could suggest a faster, more diplomatic solution when approached last week. He had already tried talking with rental agencies to see if they could address the problem

to homeowners, without success.

Cordell is not abruptly shutting down affected rental houses, but posting each picket-free cottage with a notice of unsafe conditions and notifying the owners by letter. If the property owner fails to take "prompt corrective action" to replace the pickets, a hearing will be held with the inspector and an order to correct issued. That order can be appealed to the town council.

The maximum length of time involved in the process would be 60 days, past the peak rental season, unless Cordell finds "imminent danger to life and property." Then the time frame can be shortened.

"We need to give them some time to correct it," said Councilwoman Cheri Cheek. "It will be difficult for carpenters to get in there while people are renting."

"The first kid that falls through the screen porch and is killed, we'll forget our liberal 'give them time'

position," suggested Councilman Herb Klinker.

Council also told Cordell he doesn't need to continue acting as an informal advisor to individuals who decide to serve as their own general contractor, but don't know what they're doing.

"We don't have enough time to babysit one person trying to save some money," Cordell told council, suggesting his department begin offering journeyman testing to insure that anyone who decides to be their own contractor is qualified to do so.

But testing could be "an administrative nightmare," Councilman Herb Klinker suggested.

Instead, town Attorney Mike Isenberg suggested he simply do what state law allows the inspector to do. "You can just issue a stop work order," he said. "Then it's up to them to bring the work into compliance with the code."

A re-inspection fee can be

charged every time work must be torn out and rebuilt and reinspected for compliance.

Cordell received support from council if no quick solution to another concern of his.

He had been requiring permits for major re-roofing work, thinking it was an oversight that roofs weren't specifically covered in the state building code.

The town wasn't making any money off the permits, but the process allowed him to inspect work in progress and make the contractor do it again if it wasn't done right.

But Cordell was "backed to the wall" in a challenge and lost. State code, it turns out, allows major repairs of a roof and even placing a roof of the same grade and type of material over an existing roof, without a permit.

"I tried my best to have that clause pulled out but the (State Building) Code Council wouldn't act on it."

But Cordell isn't giving up. At his request, council authorized Town Attorney Mike Isenberg to draft a resolution to send to state legislators asking them to support an amendment to change the defective law.

"I would like to see the law changed," said Cordell. "There's nothing protecting these homeowners."

## \$40,000 WILL ENABLE CASAS TO CONTINUE

### Grants To Fund Child Care Program

A series of grants from the State Board of Community Colleges will fund special projects in basic skills and provide assistance to single parents attending Brunswick Community College next school year.

Anita White, director of compensatory education at BCC and a state CASAS literacy trainer, has received two basic skills demonstration project grants from the state board.

A \$40,000 grant will enable BCC to continue using CASAS, the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, in its own literacy program, to train other instructors in the southeastern region, and to develop curriculum and resource materials to fit each basic skills program site.

Another \$25,878 will be used to rework the curriculum guide used by the Brunswick Interagency Program, the compensatory education program based at BCC.

"The curriculum we're using was written in 1984 and it's not really been looked at in 10 years. Our staff members are looking into rewriting it. It needs to be more specific, more workable."

"Unless you have a really creative instructor you have difficulty making it work for teachers or students," she said.

The existing objectives of the curriculum are too broad and don't relate directly to the quality standards

the programs are expected to meet. "Programs need to be able to show their progress in relation to the standards," she said.

Another state grant of \$30,639 to BCC will help single parents in financial need to continue their education by providing childcare.

"Some students are able to fulfill a lifelong dream because of our

childcare program," said Marcia Pittman. "Last year we were able to help quite a few students. It's a ministry."

The program attempts to pay 100 percent of all childcare expenses for eligible full-time students with non-school age children. Where appropriate, some after-school care is provided.

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