



April 25, 2016

## **DEP Cites Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority for Unapproved Water Treatment Change**

**Pittsburgh** – The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today issued an Administrative Order citing the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) for making a substantial modification to its drinking water treatment system without prior approval by DEP. The change, which occurred in April 2014, involved the use of caustic soda in place of soda ash to control corrosion in PWSA’s water distribution system. PWSA went back to the use of soda ash in January 2016.

“Preliminary data shows no imminent threat to the public as a result of this unauthorized change. We are asking PWSA to analyze all data from April 2014 to January 2016, the period the authority used caustic soda, and the rest of 2016,” said DEP Secretary John Quigley. “We have put PWSA on notice that its unilateral decision to change treatment was a clear violation of safe drinking water regulations. PWSA had no authority to modify its treatment without first demonstrating to DEP that the proposed change would not adversely impact the corrosion control treatment, and obtaining DEP approval via a permit amendment.”

DEP sampled PWSA water on Friday, April 22, as it leaves the plant on its way into the distribution system. The results showed lead levels at less than 1 part per billion; and copper levels less than 4 parts per billion. The federal Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) establishes an action level of 15 parts per billion for lead, and 1,300 parts per billion for copper

PWSA’s public water supply permit, approved in 1995, requires the use of soda ash for corrosion control. Soda ash (sodium carbonate) is used because of its ability to prevent corrosion in water pipes, and because it helps to prevent leaching of lead and copper into the water. Caustic soda (sodium hydroxide) raises the pH of water to bind up metals, but does not have carbonate to coat water lines, and relies on the natural carbonates in the authority’s source water from the Allegheny River. Although caustic soda is approved for use by some water systems, it will only be approved by DEP after proof of its effectiveness in each system

In its Administrative Order, DEP requires the following of PWSA:

- Provide initial notice to all 300,000 customers about its prior change in corrosion control chemicals and the measures it is undertaking to evaluate impacts
- Complete two rounds of lead and copper tap monitoring from 100 Tier 1 sites throughout the authority’s distribution area; with the first set of tests to be completed by June 30, with results to DEP by July 10; and the second set by December 31, with results to DEP by January 10, 2017
- Provide any sampling data PWSA collected since June 1, 2013
- Develop plan to investigate lead levels within its system, the effect of changes to treatment methods for corrosion control, and recommendations for appropriate changes to assure the best possible corrosion control measures for the system
- Outline in subsequent customer notices details of water sampling and analysis, and updates on investigation of treatment change impacts.

“DEP does not take this action lightly,” said Secretary Quigley. “We do not tolerate deviation from water quality regulations that might, in any way, potentially compromise the public’s health and safety.

Earlier this year, PWSA renewed its efforts to get customers to take advantage of free in-home tap water sampling. Customers who have concerns about their tap water can contact PWSA for free test kits and instructions on how to use them. Information on in-home testing is available on the PWSA web site: [www.pgh2o.com](http://www.pgh2o.com).

PWSA has cooperated with DEP’s initial investigation into the water treatment changes, and DEP expects that PWSA will continue to comply by conducting the required increased sampling, investigating any adverse impacts from the treatment change, and providing outreach to its customers.

For more information, including the Administrative Order, Notice of Violation, and details about this investigation, visit DEP’s Southwest Region page [here](#).

**Media contact:** Neil Shader, 717-787-1323

###