

Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

www.ci.norfolk.ne.us

February 9, 2016

“City of Norfolk Water Officials Assure Citizens Water is Safe”



Tara Brtek takes a drink at a Washington Elementary School water fountain.

Dennis Watts, City of Norfolk Water and Sewer Director, was astounded when a clerk at a store asked a member of the Water Division staff if Norfolk’s water was safe to drink. The clerk had seen on the news how the Flint, Michigan water had high lead levels and had thought Norfolk had the same problem.

“We’ve never had a problem with lead levels in Norfolk. People can be very secure in knowing that the City of Norfolk water is safe to drink,” said Watts.

He explained that City Water Division staff test Norfolk water at sites across the city for lead every three years. Watts said there is hardly a trace found in Norfolk’s water every time the water has been tested. The latest test in 2013 showed 1.2 to 4.23 parts per billion of lead in the water. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets an Action Level or level where treatment needs to occur when the water has 15 parts per billion of lead (ppb) in it. In comparison, the lead content in many homes in Flint, Michigan, was recently measured at over 100 ppb.

Water can pick up lead when it goes through lead pipes or pipes that have lead solder. Norfolk’s water contains only minimal traces of lead because its water is considered “hard water” or is high in mineral content so it somewhat coats the water pipes and lead

doesn’t get into or “leach” into the water.

“It’s suspected that what happened in Flint is that the water they were getting from a nearby river had a lot of chloride in it. That chloride is very corrosive so it could easily leach the lead out of the pipes and cause there to be high levels of lead in the water,” Watts said.

If the lead concentrations exceed 15 ppb in more than 10% of the customer taps samples, the water system must undertake actions to control corrosion. The public must also be informed of steps to take to protect their health and may need to replace any lead pipes in their home or business.

Norfolk’s water does not come from any river or other surface water. All of Norfolk’s water comes from underground wells so there isn’t the chloride in the water that a river might have. Chlorides can be found in a river that has agricultural runoff, wastewater from industries, wastewater from water softening or road salt in it.

This summer from June 1 through September 1 it will be time for Norfolk’s water to again be tested for both lead and copper. Watts said division staff test water samples for lead from older homes which are more likely to have lead pipes. They also take samples from homes newer than 1988 that have copper pipes and these are tested for

copper content. In 2013, there were also very little traces of copper in the water which shows that there are very few corrosive agents in Norfolk water.

“We regularly test Norfolk water not only for lead and copper but for 95 different chemicals. We also test for coliform bacteria on a weekly basis which is an indicator of the health of the water system. Safety is our number one concern when it comes to supplying water to Norfolk citizens. We know that safe and bountiful water supply is vital for any community,” Watts said.

For more information about Norfolk’s water and to view water quality reports, go to <http://www.ci.norfolk.ne.us/water>.