



ALLEGHENY COUNTY CONTROLLER  
**CHELSA WAGNER**



EFFICIENCY. TRANSPARENCY. INNOVATION. ACCOUNTABILITY.

February 24, 2017

Public Comment to PWSA Board of Directors

My name is Jaime Jones, and I am here on behalf of County Controller Chelsa Wagner, who couldn't attend due to a prior commitment.

I present these remarks to you knowing full well that this board is a body of City government; a City government, which by design, has at its head the office of the Mayor.

So as Controller Wagner continues to call for immediate action on our crisis of lead in drinking water, we recognize that you all serve, in one form or another, at the pleasure of the Mayor.

Controller Wagner is calling on Pittsburgh to **recognize** its lead crisis and **act** on it **immediately**.

The actions taken to date have NOT sounded the alarm to alert residents that their drinking water may not be safe – but quite the contrary. It is unbelievable that this Authority has in fact encouraged residents to – quote – DRINK THE WATER?!?!

As a practical matter, nearly all of the constituents with whom Controller Wagner speaks have no idea of how widespread our lead problem is, or the extent of the health risks – certainly on young children – but to residents of all ages.

Pittsburgh has admitted that approximately one in four PWSA homes have lead service lines, YET it does not know where those lines are!

This appears in effect to be a game of Russian Roulette with the lives of our residents – most especially our youth – for whom lead can have long-term irreversible impacts of diminished IQ's and related deficiencies.

How on earth is Pittsburgh not acting on this?

The overwhelming presence of lead lines in as many as 30% of PWSA homes or perhaps more, coupled with the change in corrosion control in 2014, has created a CRISIS in Pittsburgh.

We are not like other cities that merely have lead lines and aging infrastructure.

We had, as you all know, a change in corrosion controls, and now have lead abundantly present in the drinking water of many of our homes – putting roughly **one in four homes** at risk.

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But what are we doing? There has been no action to ensure public safety – in a city where many people remain entirely unaware, and drink water from the tap, when the water in their own homes is a silent threat that they don't even know about.

And we all should be OUTRAGED that we have a County Health Department that continues to seek to distract our residents by saying “paint, paint, paint” every time it is asked to speak on our WATER crisis. Pittsburghers are NOT so easily fooled.

What the City MUST do is crystal clear:

The City must immediately identify every single lead service line and ACT now to get every line removed. The snail pace of removing 7% per year as REQUIRED by the EPA is unacceptable; as is the snail pace of identifying the lines over six years.

The City must acknowledge that there is a solution to removing these lines now. This isn't a wish! This is the very reason government exists – to protect residents and provide the most basic services – and clean water is a right that is at the very core of our democracy.

Other cities have proven that these lines can be removed at a much faster pace, and also affordably, well within the means of our City's resources.

And let's not forget that this means the ENTIRE service line up to the resident's property. ENOUGH of the false legal posturing claiming that the City cannot replace the entire line because of state law. There is no legal prohibition in state law – look east to Philadelphia. The shadow of the “authority” structure as a prohibition is false. The only prohibition we face is political will and leadership.

And while the City is embarking on a full replacement plan – **it MUST provide filters to every resident IMMEDIATELY. TODAY!** Filters approved by the NSF protect nearly 100% against lead, and they cost roughly the same as the tests the PWSA is currently providing.

Those tests, by the way, have frankly done nothing but further confuse the issue, as they are unreliable and imprecise because lead is not continually and evenly released, but is released in chunks. So while a resident may get one low reading, her following reading could be vastly different, and she would have never known to protect herself because of the inherent faultiness of these tests.

Full line replacement AND provision of filters are especially imperative in a City where more than 50% of our residents are renters, and where many residents are on fixed income or are low income.

No more cover up. No more delay. No more deceit. No more distraction.

Let us be clear that NO level of lead in drinking water is safe.

We must act immediately to remove lead from our drinking water, and recognize that there is NOTHING standing in our way from implementing the solution. We have a crisis and the solution is within our reach. THAT is the leadership that Pittsburgh residents deserve.