



Developing a Communication Plan

It is very important to have an effective communication plan to deliver information quickly, professionally and consistently. Lead in school drinking water can cause health effects in children. Telling parents and staff about your lead sampling program will demonstrate your commitment to protecting children and staff health. Communicating early and often about your testing plans, results and next steps will build confidence in your ability to provide a safe environment.

When developing your communication plan:

- Take the initiative to communicate with your community
- Make sure your information is honest, accurate and comprehensive
- Speak with one consistent voice
- Anticipate questions and concerns and address them proactively
- Be positive and forthcoming
- Keep your audiences up-to-date as new information becomes available

Follow these steps to developing a successful and proactive communication plan.

STEP 1: Get Your Team Together

Assemble a team with technical and communications expertise. Draw from internal resources as well as professionals and leaders in your community. Designate a spokesperson to make announcements, respond to questions, and conduct interviews in order to ensure the accuracy and consistency of public information.

To support engagement with the community and build trust, it is important to begin communication *before testing starts* and be open and transparent throughout the process.

STEP 2: Create a Contact List

Having names, phone numbers, and email addresses at your fingertips is vital, especially when a quick response is necessary. Create a contact list and update it regularly. It may include:

- School Superintendent
- School Board Members
- Civic Leaders
- Local Public Health Officials



- Head of Building
- Maintenance/Custodial Services
- Office of Public Instruction (OPI)
- State Department of Health
- Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
- Utility/Water Supplier
- Media (Newspaper, TV, Radio, Web and Newswire Outlets)

STEP 3: Identify Your Target Audiences

Generally, there are six primary audiences or interested parties involved in the control of lead in drinking water.

1. School Community: Employees, students and parents should be informed and involved from the beginning of the process.
2. Facility Users: Community members that use the school facilities and buildings for other functions (e.g., local community groups, school board members). Members of the community probably do not utilize the facility as frequently as the members of the school or child care facilities community, but they should still be kept informed and up-to-date regarding lead in the drinking water.
3. Larger Community: The larger community may consist of local residents and businesses in the school district or town. The local and regional media can serve as a conduit for information for the larger local community. It is important that you be prepared to generate accurate news releases. The spokesperson or task force should be prepared to respond to interview requests with accurate and consistent information.
4. Local Community Organizations: Local health officials such as health officers, environmental health specialists, doctors and nurses can help you and your community understand health risks associated with elevated lead levels in drinking water. Local environmental community organizations may have an interest and may provide assistance or resources for schools and child care facilities.
5. State Drinking Water Programs: State drinking water programs (MT DEQ) are responsible for ensuring that public water systems comply with the state and federal regulations regarding lead in drinking water. States may be able to provide guidance on or technical assistance with communication plan, health risks, and identifying other lead sources.
6. Drinking Water Community: Public water systems comprise the regulated drinking water community, and they are responsible for complying with all national and state drinking water standards. The public water system that serves your facility can provide technical information to support your program and can provide information to the community about what the system is doing to minimize lead in drinking water.



STEP 4: Know Your Methods of Communication

The public notification methods described below can be applied independently or in combination to communicate about drinking water issues and the meaning of sampling program results.

Important note: You should also plan how you will provide information in other languages, as appropriate, or provide a contact name for non-English speakers to get more information.

Methods of Communication
Press Release: A press release in the local newspaper or on local TV and radio stations can potentially reach a broad range of people. It is important that the release inform readers of how to obtain the sampling results and other lead information (as it pertains to drinking water) and include the phone number of the point(s) of contact.
Letters/Fliers: Letters or fliers represent a direct and effective method of communicating the Lead Reduction in School Drinking Water Program activities to parents/guardians and other members of a school, or building community. Letter templates are available on DEQ's Lead Reduction in School Drinking Water Program webpage (Deq.mt.gov/Lead).
Mailbox or Paycheck Stuffers: Mailbox and paycheck stuffers represent a direct and effective method of communicating Lead Reduction in School Drinking Water Program activities to your employees. Stuffers would contain information similar to that contained in a press release or letter/flier.
Staff Newsletter: A notice contained in a staff newsletter is another option for directly and effectively communicating information about the Lead Reduction in School Drinking Water Program to employees.
Presentations: Providing presentations at facility-related meetings can also serve as an effective means of communication. Relevant events include meetings of PTAs, faculty and the school board.
Email and Websites: Electronic communications are convenient for many parents. Websites can be updated frequently to quickly convey new information. Consider creating a separate email address for the Lead Reduction in School Drinking Water Program and providing it on the website and outreach materials. Email provides a quick, easy method for parents to ask questions, but responses must be timely to be effective.
Social Media: Updates on the status of the Lead Reduction in School Drinking Water Program and information on regular activities can be provided to the public with ease via official social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)



STEP 5: Identify Times for Communicating

Timely dissemination of communication materials is of the utmost importance. Public communication efforts are less complicated and generate less conflict if those potentially affected are notified in advance of important issues and events.

At a minimum, It is recommended that schools provide information to members of the school community, local community, facility users and the larger community (if appropriate) at the following times:

- Before the lead in drinking water sampling program begins.
- After obtaining the results of testing:
 - As soon as the results are available
 - When/if corrective measures are decided upon
 - If no corrective measures are appropriate because the lead levels are low
- In response to periodic interest in the program.

STEP 6: Start Communicating

Remember to communicate throughout your program, and work with partners and your communication team to be proactive and transparent. Recommended steps to help make your program a success:

- Launch an ongoing education and awareness campaign, capitalizing on a variety of communication vehicles.
- Prepare a fact sheet so that your spokesperson has accurate, up-to-date information about the status of your plumbing system and program.
- Post information on your website in a central location.
- Make sure your communication materials include:
 - Details about the nature of the Lead Reduction in School Drinking Water Program.
 - The results of the sampling program and plans for correcting any identified problems.
 - Information on the public health effects and risks posed by lead in drinking water and the significance of lead in other sources such as food, air, dust and soil.
 - How and where individuals may seek blood-lead level testing if they are concerned. Parents can contact their health provider or local health department.
 - How families can increase their awareness of potential lead exposure in their homes and elsewhere.
 - The availability of general resources on lead in drinking water.

All materials can be found here: Deq.mt.gov/Lead



Planning Template

Fill out the Chart below to get started building your team. Note, some people may have more than one role.

Role/Description	Lead	Back-up
Example - <u>School Lead Contact</u> : This person will act as the point of contact for your school and help coordinate the communication efforts.		
Example - <u>Communication Contact</u> : This person will communicate with stakeholders and partners regarding the program.		
Example - <u>Sampler</u> : This person will perform the sampling activities.		

The Developing a Communication Plan template is sourced from the Environmental Protection Agency's templates. Small changes were made for the



Lead Reduction in Schools Program. Please edit for your school's audience and use.