**Fiscal Facts: Getting the lead out**

Since 1998, Wisconsin water utilities have replaced or taken out of service more than 73,000 lead service lines that connect to homes and businesses, reducing a potential public health risk in communities around the state.

State data show more than 37,000 of these lines have been replaced or turned off since 2018 – more in the last five years than in the previous two decades. This is due to a coordinated effort by local, state, and federal efforts to address this pressing public health concern.

While lead-based paint poses a greater danger to human health, a 2008 study found lead from drinking water still contributed an estimated 10% to 20% of the lead intake of U.S. children, and the figure is higher still for infants fed with baby formula.

Nearly 200 Wisconsin water utilities have shut down at least one lead service line since 1998, and 18 municipalities have eliminated more than 1,000 each. Efforts to remove this concern within our water system are underway in cities such as Wausau, Beaver Dam, and Milwaukee. Others such as Kenosha and Manitowoc have also made notable progress and Stoughton recently finished replacing all its lead lines.

Though this trend represents massive progress from previous decades, lead lines still lurk underground in scores of communities across the state and possibly more. The estimated number of utility-owned lead lines still in service is more than 158,000.

About 44% of the state’s estimated lead water service lines are in Milwaukee, while the rest are distributed across Wisconsin. While Milwaukee has the most total lead lines, a few communities have an even greater share or comparable share of lead lines, primarily in the Milwaukee suburbs or in northern Wisconsin.

On the heels of the progress made in recent years, more funding is on the way from Washington, D.C. From the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021, Wisconsin can expect to receive $373 million in funding over the next several years for lead line replacement.

At the current pace, Wisconsin’s water utilities could replace all of their lead laterals over the next two decades. Some have argued that, given the public health risk, these replacements should happen even faster.

What is clear, however, is that lead pipes in Wisconsin are being replaced more rapidly now than at any point on record, and this pace may even accelerate in the years to come.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*