

The Honorable Christie Whitman
Administrator
United States Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Whitman:

It has been a privilege to partner with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on several public events to highlight your efforts to ensure the health of citizens across the country and safeguard the nation's water supplies. A new issue, which was initially perceived to be an isolated local event, is quickly escalating into a national problem impacting citizens and water utilities across the nation -- presenting another opportunity for us to partner. Let me take this opportunity to update you on the problem of copper pipe pinhole leaks.

Since summer 2000, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) has been aggressively working to determine the cause of copper pipe pinhole leaks impacting families from throughout our service area of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, Maryland. To date, more than 4,500 customers have reported these leaks to us by completing our pinhole leak questionnaire (available on our website at www.wsscwater.com). These leaks can cause considerable damage resulting in costly repairs, mold problems, increased insurance rates, and, in some cases, customers having their insurance policies cancelled.

Working closely with the Copper Development Association, master plumbers, local officials and nationally recognized water quality and/or copper corrosion experts including Dr. Marc Edwards of Virginia Tech, we've been able to discount many factors as the primary causes of pinhole leaks in our service area. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, we will probably never know the exact cause of pinhole leaks impacting WSSC customers.

However, recent research conducted by Dr. Edwards indicates that EPA requirements related to corrosion control (Lead and Copper Rule) and the removal of natural organic matter (NOM), coupled with best industry practices, may promote copper pipe pinhole leaks. As you may know, corrosion experts now believe that some of the chemicals making up the NOM act as corrosion inhibitors and protect metal piping.

Similar kinds of copper pipe pinhole leaks are occurring elsewhere in Maryland – areas not served by WSSC – and across the nation. In fact, Dr. Edwards has indicated that he receives calls every day from utilities and consumers across the country. He estimates he has heard of a different impacted system every three days for the last few weeks and he strongly suspects the problem is getting worse nationally.

In light of Dr. Edwards' latest research indicating federal water chemistry regulations may play a role in this problem, we strongly encourage EPA's involvement in this national issue. Mr. George Rizzo from your Region 3 Office attended our recent taskforce meeting at which Dr. Edwards presented his latest work and indicated he would consider the information discussed at that session. However, we feel a strong sense of urgency to meet with appropriate staff members from your Washington, D.C. office to brief them on this groundbreaking work.

Please contact me at (301) 206-8777 with any questions or comments you may have. Additionally, we would greatly appreciate your suggestion of appropriate officials with whom we should meet to discuss EPA's interest in this national issue. Thank you for your time, consideration and your continued support of our mission to provide safe water to our customers and return clean water to our environment.

Sincerely,

John R. Griffin
General Manager

cc: The Honorable Douglas M. Duncan
The Honorable Jack Johnson
The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
The Honorable Constance A. Morella
The Honorable Paul S. Sarbanes
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
The Honorable Albert R. Wynn
Montgomery County Delegation Members
Prince George's County Delegation Members
Montgomery County Councilmembers
Prince George's County Councilmembers

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