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## **Pittsburgh water authority set back \$32M by unpaid accounts**

AARON AUPPERLEE  (<https://twitter.com/TinyNotebook>) | Monday, Feb. 29, 2016, 11:15 p.m.

Broken water meters and billing disputes have ballooned into a more than \$30 million problem for the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority.

The authority had \$32.3 million in unpaid water and sewer bills on its books. But it won't collect the money or shut off accounts until it figures out what the almost 45,000 delinquent residential and commercial accounts owe on water or sewer payments or both, said Kent Lindsay, the authority's finance director.

"We have been tackling these one at a time, and they are not easy to get through," Lindsay said. "We could be very aggressive and just shut everybody off, but we don't want to do that with our current billing situation."

Almost 23,000 residential water and sewer customers owe a combined \$14.9 million, according to data PWSA provided to the Tribune-Review. Almost \$13 million of that is more than six months overdue. PWSA also bills for the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority.

Brendan Schubert, a spokesman for PWSA, said the authority has collected about \$2 million in delinquent payments from residential accounts in recent months.

More than 2,100 commercial accounts, including the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, Point State Park, UPMC, Allegheny County and Reserve, a township of about 3,500 just outside of the city that buys water from PWSA, are \$8.3 million in arrears on water and sewer payments. Almost \$3 million of that is more than six months overdue.

"It's not that we don't want to pay them, it's that we want to pay them properly," said Jeremy Rekich, an assistant regional manager in the Office of State Parks about Point State Park's \$831,463 delinquent bill with PWSA.

Rekich said the park disputes readings from PWSA meters. The park uses 800,000 gallons of PWSA water twice a summer to fill its fountain and the reservoir feeding it.

And \$6.3 million is owed on 3,500 vacant lots where PWSA continued to bill because the authority wasn't informed the lots were empty. More than 16,000 sewage-only customers owe \$2.9 million.

The data on delinquent accounts is as of Feb. 19. Schubert said the status of delinquent accounts changes frequently as the authority resolves issues and some customers pay. PWSA claims to have about 300,000 customers.

The authority is owed nearly 40 times more than other water authorities in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties combined. The counties are served by more than 30 water authorities. Not all responded to the Tribune-Review's request for delinquency data, but the 20 that did reported nearly \$860,000 in past-due bills.

The Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County serves about 125,000 customers in five counties and reported nearly \$83,000 in delinquent bills. The West View Water Authority, which serves about 200,000 people, has 60 delinquent accounts owing \$28,235.

Lindsay, who was hired in August and earns \$170,000 annually, said the authority addressed delinquent accounts "sporadically" in the past. He assigned a couple of employees to focus on problem accounts last month.

City Controller Michael Lamb said the number of delinquent bills represents, in part, the level of "chaos and mess in their billing department." PWSA has been sued because faulty meters overcharged customers. Some customers didn't get a bill for six months, Lamb said. His office is auditing PWSA and looking at billing and delinquencies.

"We know that there are serious billing problems down there only because we hear about it from ratepayers and we see it in the audit," Lamb said. "I just think it's really problematic that here they are asking ratepayers to pay more money when they can't get their own delinquencies in order."

PWSA raised its rates 2.6 percent this year, the third straight annual increase. Total bills for PWSA customers increased more than 2.6 percent because the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority increased its sewage rates.

The authority is expected to raise rates again in 2017. Average monthly water bills increased \$4.32 per month in 2014 and \$1.94 in 2015. Average water bills increased \$1.26 this year and will increase 77 cents next year.

Collecting even a fraction of what the authority thinks it is owed could stave off rate increases. Each 1 percent rate increase nets the authority \$1 million more in revenue, Lindsay said.

"Certainly, if \$30 million rolled in, it would reduce the amount of rate increases that we need," Lindsay said. "But let's face it, that's pie in the sky. A lot of those balances are old, and a lot of that is not going to be collectible."

PWSA billing complaints flood Pittsburgh Councilwoman Theresa Kail-Smith's office almost daily. She said she's tired of just talking to the authority about the problem. Smith questioned the \$240,000 salary the board gave Executive Director Jim Good when it hired him in May.

"It's very disheartening," Kail-Smith said of the repeated issues, concerns, complaints and frustrations plaguing PWSA. "At this point, I think it merits more than a discussion with PWSA. I think it merits action."

Kail-Smith would not say what she thinks should happen.

The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh topped PWSA's delinquent list, owing nearly \$1 million on 25 accounts, according to PWSA.

Lindsay and Michelle Jackson, a spokeswoman for the housing authority, said representatives meet frequently to work out disputes over water bills.

"It's imperative that we verify the bills and charges for accuracy so we can spend government dollars appropriately to resolve any outstanding issues," Jackson wrote in an email.

UPMC's unpaid balance dropped from about \$565,000 to \$239.18 in a matter of months, Schubert said. Allegheny County claims it paid its balance, except charges on two accounts in Blawnox that the county disputes, said Amie Downs, a county spokeswoman. Downs said the accounts serve other businesses but the county gets bills. PWSA is investigating, Schubert said.

Reserve suspects a meter under Troy Hill Road is broken, said township Manager Tom Lavorini. The township's delinquent bill is \$647,800.

"Right now, we're having a little bit of a dispute about one of the meters that PWSA reads to bill us," Lavorini said. "We're delinquent but, I don't know how to say, but that's not the case."

Lavorini said money has been set aside to pay the water bill once the meter is fixed and both sides determine how much is owed. Schubert said meter repair has gone out to bid and the authority hopes to have a new one installed by June.

Aaron Aupperlee is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-320-7986 or [aaupperlee@tribweb.com](mailto:aaupperlee@tribweb.com) (<mailto:aaupperlee@tribweb.com>).

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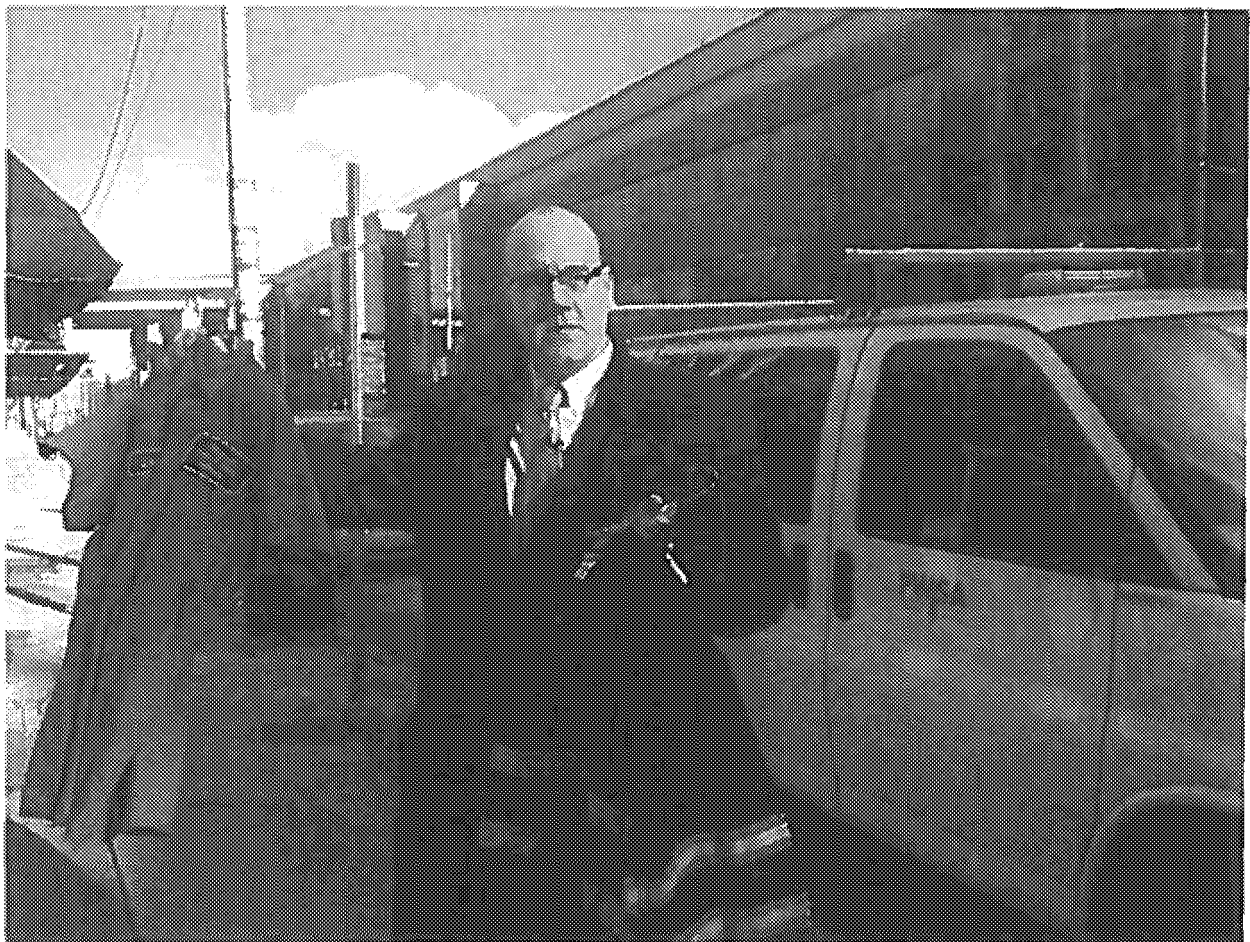
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## **PWSA director resigns as frustrations mount over erroneous water bills**

BOB BAUDER [✈](https://twitter.com/BobBauder) (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Thursday, March 3, 2016, 4:15 p.m.



*Bill Vidonic | Tribune-Review*

Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority interim Executive Director Jim Good displays clothing on Thursday, Jan. 24, 2013, that company workers should be wearing when they call on customers.

The executive director of the Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority resigned Thursday amid mounting customer complaints about overbilling and poor customer service.

The authority's board accepted Jim Good's resignation immediately and began a nationwide search for his replacement.

In the interim, the board appointed former Allegheny Regional Asset District Director David Donahoe as Good's replacement. Donahoe will be paid \$10,000 a month, the equivalent of his salary at RAD.

Good resigned two days after the Tribune-Review reported that PWSA had amassed \$32.3 million in unpaid water and sewer bills.

City officials said Good's resignation was voluntary, but they expressed concerns about the authority's response to billing and customer service complaints.

"We were dissatisfied with the measures that had been taken so far, and we really wanted to see a better outcome," said City Councilwoman Deb Gross of Highland Park, who is on the PWSA board.

She noted that her office has received "dozens and dozens" of complaints this year.

"We had higher expectations for service for our constituents," she said.

Good, 52, who was hired in May at an annual salary of \$240,000, issued a statement saying PWSA evolved under his leadership into a "performance-based organization focused on stakeholder needs." He said he was proud of his accomplishments and praised PWSA employees for a job well done.

"Everything the PWSA needs to be a great water utility is in place," he said. "I wish my colleagues and friends at the authority, its board and the administration nothing but the best in their efforts to build on this legacy and ensure its transformation is successfully completed."

Good served three years on an interim basis as an employee of Veolia North America, which was hired by PWSA in 2012 to help improve the authority's performance. PWSA board Chairman Alex W. Thomson in May called Good's permanent hiring "the most important decision this board has made in its tenure."

Thomson said Thursday that the authority has improved its internal operations, capital planning and construction coordination, but still has many challenges.

"With the support of Mayor William Peduto, this board has dedicated itself to tackling the tough decisions to get the authority heading in the right direction," Thomson wrote in a statement. "The board thanks Jim Good for his efforts in this regard. However, we are keenly aware of the frustration some customers have with the continued billing and customer service problems. We understand that much work still needs to be done. We are determined as a board to fix these problems and gain back the trust of all our customers as quickly as possible."

Before Good's permanent hiring, PWSA had operated with temporary directors since 2010, when Michael Kenney resigned during a scandal over a water line insurance program. The authority has since been criticized for risky bond investments, high debt,

poor customer service and neglected infrastructure.

"This has been 20 years or more of insufficient investment and management," Peduto said. "You can't put this all on the shoulders of Mr. Good and previous managers."

Bob Bauder is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (<mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com>).

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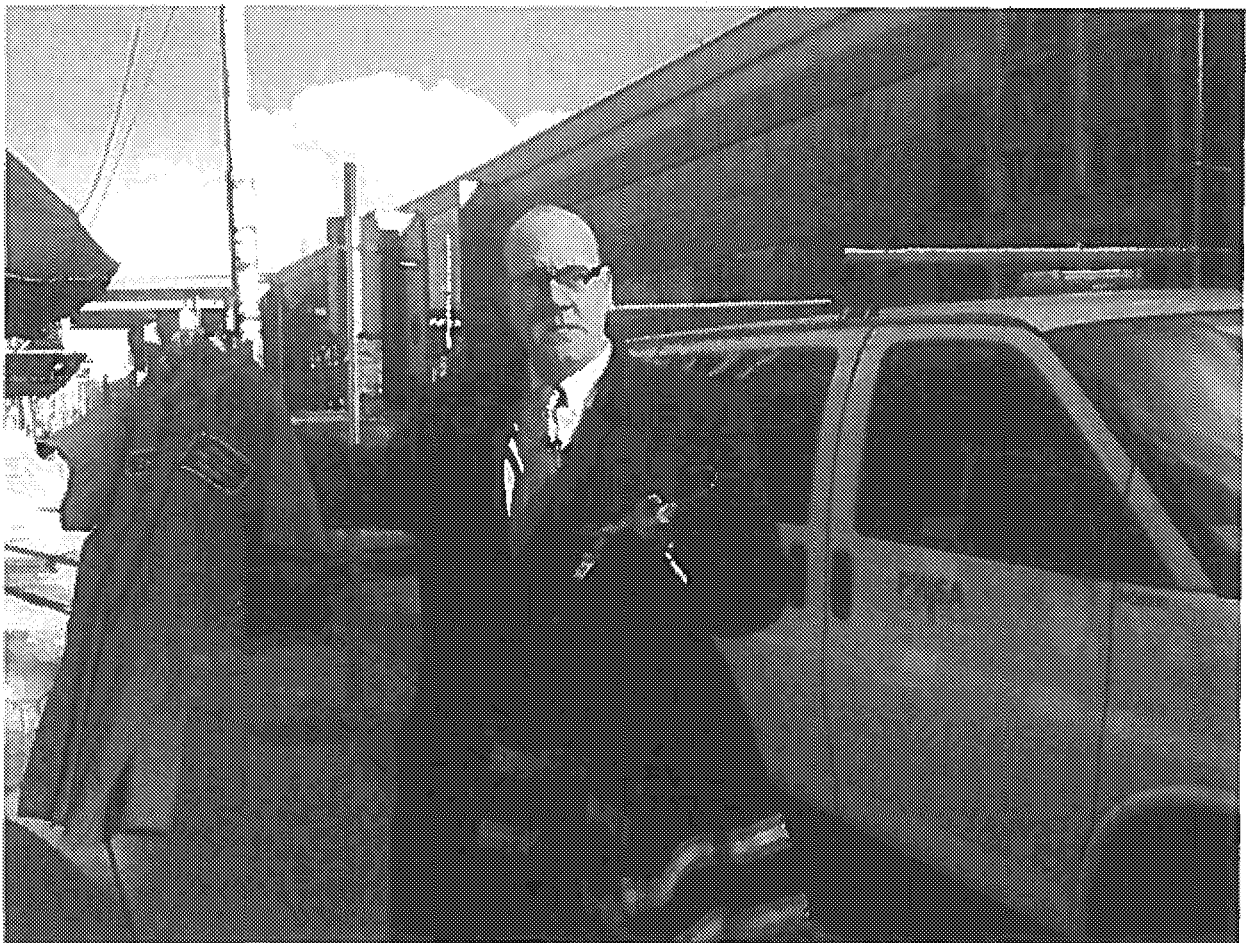
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## Ex-PWSA director to receive \$60K severance, medical benefits

BOB BAUDER 🐦 (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Friday, March 4, 2016, 12:51 p.m.



*Bill Vidonic | Tribune-Review*

Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority interim Executive Director Jim Good displays clothing on Thursday, Jan. 24, 2013, that company workers should be wearing when they call on customers.

The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority's board agreed to a severance package that will pay former Executive Director Jim Good \$60,000 plus medical benefits for six months, board officials said Friday.

Good resigned Thursday amid mounting customer complaints about overbilling and poor customer service. The board appointed former Allegheny Regional Asset District Director David Donahoe as Good's replacement. Donahoe will be paid \$10,000 a month.

Board Chairman Alex Thomson said PWSA agreed to pay Good a \$60,000 lump sum and health care coverage that will cost the authority approximately \$10,000.

Good, 52, could not be reached for comment. The board signed him in May to a three-year contract at an annual salary of \$240,000. Good served for three years before that as interim director.

Paul Leger, Pittsburgh's finance director and a member of PWSA's board, said the board approached Donahoe before Good's resignation and inquired about his interest in heading the authority if a change in leadership occurred.

"Dave was available and a number of us on the board knew him," Leger said. "We lucked out."

The Tribune-Review reported on Tuesday that the authority has amassed \$32.3 million in unpaid sewer and water bills. Some customers told the Trib that they are challenging the accuracy of billing.

Leger said billing problems persist, but the authority is making progress. He said employees have reduced errors from about 50 percent to "4 or 5 percent" of total bills.

PWSA has about 300,000 customers.

"When you start to tamper with that and start to fix it you uncover other problems," Leger said. "That's what's going on with the billing. Every time we address one thing, four or five other problems crop up. The change in leadership gives us new ways to address those problems."

Bob Bauder is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (<mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com>).

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## **PWSA 'overwhelmed' by volume of complaints about inaccurate bills**

BOB BAUDER 🐦 (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Monday, March 14, 2016, 6:03 p.m.

The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority in 2014 promised a new \$9.4 million electronic meter reading system would provide accurate and real-time billing information to customers.

But the system in many cases didn't "talk" to the authority's new billing software, according to acting Executive Director David Donahoe, who appeared before Pittsburgh City Council on Monday during a public meeting.

The result: nearly 50,000 inaccurate bills, said Councilwoman Deb Gross of Highland Park, who serves on the PWSA board of directors.

"The marriage of the reading and the billing systems did not go well in all cases," said Donahoe, who was appointed March 3 to head PWSA after the resignation of Executive Director Jim Good. "Our goal is to get this marriage working as soon as we can possibly do that."

Donahoe said a major problem is that Pittsburgh homes are equipped with a variety of old water meters of different makes, models and operations. Sewer bills are based on water usage. PWSA employees and a consulting team are working to make electronic readers communicate with the water meters and billing.

Work is about 99 percent complete for 70,500 affected residential customers and about 60 percent complete for 9,600 commercial customers, Donahoe said. Inaccurate billing has dropped from about 50 percent to 3 percent, said Paul Leger, Pittsburgh's finance director and a PWSA board member.

The Tribune-Review reported last month that PWSA had \$32.3 million in delinquent bills. Council members said they continue to field complaints from frustrated water customers.

One woman told Councilwoman Natalia Rudiak's office that she couldn't afford Christmas gifts last year because of high water bills. A North Side man told Councilwoman Darlene Harris of Spring Hill that he cashed in his retirement savings to pay his PWSA bill.

"These are complaints just from our office alone," said Councilwoman Theresa Kail-Smith of Westwood, waving a stack of papers several inches thick. "It's a huge stack. I don't understand what the problem is."

Rudiak of Carrick estimated that her office staff spent two weeks in total work time over the past year dealing with complaints of rude treatment by PWSA employees, inconsistent answers to the same question, dismissive attitudes and excessive phone call hold time. Donahoe blamed the poor customer service on the billing issue. He said telephone operators were overwhelmed by the volume of calls and could not give accurate information because of incorrect meter readings.

"I have told everyone who works at the authority that they have to treat the public with the respect they deserve," he said.

Council members said complaints about utilities and other city authorities are rare.

"I think the fundamental question is we have never been able to get to the kernel of what makes PWSA so different than all these other authorities," Rudiak said.

Bob Bauder is a staff writer for Trib Total Media. He can be reached at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (<mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com>).

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## **\$5M water bill shocks Brighton Heights customer who owes less than \$100**

BOB BAUDER  (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Thursday, March 17, 2016, 5:36 p.m.

Mindy Rice nearly fainted when a water shutoff notice arrived last month stating she owed \$5 million to the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority.

"It was like, 'Oh my god, are we supplying water to all of Observatory Hill?'" the 51-year-old Brighton Heights resident said Thursday. "All we could do was laugh. I mean, what would you do if you saw that?"

PWSA spokesman Brendan Schubert said the amount was the result of "human error," explaining that Rice's account number was mistakenly entered in place of the amount she owed.

The error was made at a bad time for the water authority. Two weeks ago, PWSA Executive Director Jim Good resigned amid mounting criticism about inaccurate billing. This week, City Council members told PWSA interim Director David Donahoe that they field calls daily from people complaining about billing errors and poor customer service.

The authority has racked up nearly 50,000 inaccurate bills because of electronic meter readers that don't communicate correctly with the authority's billing system, according to PWSA officials.

The Tribune-Review reported in February that PWSA had \$32.3 million in delinquent bills.

Schubert said Rice owed the authority \$191.15 in past due charges, but the authority discounted that by \$94.46 as a courtesy because of the error.

That leaves a past due balance of \$96.69, which Rice said she is more than willing to pay.

"I need water. I have kids here, but I'm not paying \$5 million," she said. "If I had \$5 million, I don't think I'd be living in the city."

Staff writer Aaron Aupperlee contributed. Bob Bauder is a staff writer for Trib Total Media. He can be reached at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (<mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com>).

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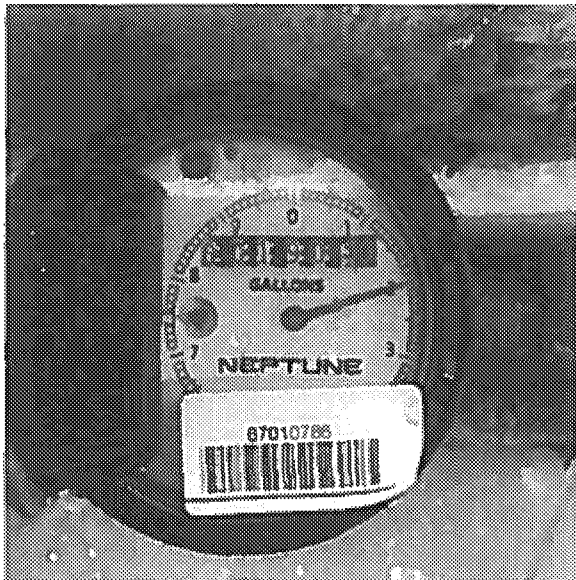
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## Hey! Mt. Washington couple's bills fault of PWSA, or of dirty spirits?

ERIC HEYL | Thursday, March 17, 2016, 11:25 p.m.



*Photo courtesy of Janine Yelenovsky*

The Yelenovskys' water meter indicated much less water was being used than what was reflected on their bills.

Ethereal spirits evidently invaded the empty house, and they must have enjoyed taking long showers.

But should Robert and Janine Yelenovsky be on the hook for the indulgences of waterlogged wraiths?

The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority believes so. The agency refuses to refund the couple \$676 for 36,000 gallons of water the Yelenovskys contend they were erroneously billed for between last March and November.

The Yelenovskys said their house on Winton Street in Mt. Washington was vacant after mid-April, when they moved to Oakdale. They have photos that seem to show the usage registered on the meter was far less than the amount the authority claimed when billing them.

"There's no way that much water was being used in an empty house," said Robert Yelenovsky, 52, a retirement plan financial adviser. "Something is seriously wrong with (the authority)."

The fact that fiasco flows as freely at the agency as the water it supplies is indisputable.

The authority has admitted sending 50,000 bills that were inaccurate because its reading and billing systems weren't in sync. As the Trib reported last month, the problems contributed to \$32.3 million in delinquent bills. Authority Executive Director Jim Good resigned days after that revelation.

The authority's problems have been well-documented. Less so has been its progress in addressing them, perhaps making the Yelenovskys' situation insightful to other rate-payers.

Yelenovsky said he typically was billed for about 2,600 gallons a month. That number skyrocketed to 14,000 gallons in March 2015 when a new meter was installed, and between May and November totaled 26,000 gallons — even though the house was empty during that time.

"When I called to complain, I was told we had a leak," he said. "I had a plumber come out, and he said that was incorrect."

Yelenovsky began taking pictures of the meter each month to record the inaccuracies. They were enclosed in a complaint he filed with the authority in January.

In a letter last week to the Yelenovskys, the agency noted only that it had complied with its own regulation to make at least one in-person meter reading per year at the address.

"Unless you can provide evidence to the contrary, the appeal must be denied," customer service assistant manager Mary Lou Fagan wrote.

She then helpfully provided a phone number for the couple to set up a payment plan.

Authority officials on Thursday declined to elaborate on Fagan's letter, pending further review of the Yelenovsky account that the authority reviewed in denying the couple's appeal.

"What's happening is outrageous," Yelenovsky said.

Indeed.


But don't blame the authority, which insists the Yelenovskys' assertions have no merit. Blame the Yelenovskys for letting those spirits linger in the shower of their empty house.

If only they had called the Ghostbusters ...

Eric Heyl is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-320-7857 or [ehey@tribweb.com](mailto:ehey@tribweb.com) (<mailto:ehey@tribweb.com>).



## Overbrook residents, PWSA clash over troubled sewer

BOB BAUDER  (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Sunday, April 10, 2016, 11:06 p.m.



*Guy Wathen / Tribune-Review*

(From left to right) Homehurst Avenue homeowners Jim Rauber, Patti Schanck, Natalie Leon, Steve Sell, and Louise Sell in Overbrook on Saturday, April 9, 2016.

Residents of Homehurst Avenue in Overbrook say the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority has maintained their common sewer line for decades but now claims they are responsible for costly repairs that could exceed the value of their homes.

The Allegheny County Health Department in 2014 cited a dozen homeowners with violating department regulations after a backup sent raw sewage into the street.

Residents were given a choice: Replace the line or agree to share its future maintenance costs. They said PWSA estimated the replacement cost at \$500,000 to \$1 million, possibly more.

"I've got a \$50,000 house down there, and they want me to pay \$80,000 or \$90,000 to put a sewer line in," said Jim Rauber, 72. "They can have the house."

Residents have appealed the department's citation but have been waiting for more than two years for a hearing. Department spokeswoman Melissa Wade said the department intends to schedule a hearing, but it had not done so as of Friday.

PWSA spokesman Brendan Schubert said authority records indicate the Homehurst sewer line is privately owned. He said PWSA maintains 1,250 miles of public sewer lines. Private owners maintain another 750 miles, which includes lines running from homes to a sewer main, he said.

Pittsburgh's Department of Public Works maintained city sewers before PWSA was created in 1999. Schubert said PWSA has no prior maintenance records for the Homehurst line.

"When (PWSA) was created, we didn't assume responsibility for all sewer lines," Schubert said. "What we assumed responsibility for were publicly maintained sewer lines on record drawings that were turned over to us."

Residents fear the sewer line will block up again and PWSA will refuse to fix it, leaving them stuck with the cost. They said their homes are in limbo until the dispute is resolved.

"Right now if something happened and we had to sell our house, we couldn't," Rauber said.

Problems on Homehurst — where houses date to the 1920s — began in early 2014 when the sewer line backed up. PWSA unclogged the line, residents said, but balked when it backed up again later that year.

"They're trying to say we're private and we're not part of PWSA," said Natalie Leon, 69. "How can that be possible? The city always serviced us. There was never a question of being part of the city."

The authority eventually fixed the problem when raw sewage began running down the street. In October 2014, residents received the health department's citation.

"We just want (PWSA) to take responsibility for the line and quit asking us to absorb the cost of replacing it," said resident Patti Schanck, 55.

City Councilwoman Natalia Rudiak of Carrick, who represents Overbrook, said her office has been trying to resolve the problem for more than a year. Rudiak has asked the health department to dismiss the citation.

"There is no way — no way — that homeowners should have the burden of this cost," she said.

Bob Bauder is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (<mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com>).

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## **Pennsylvania DEP says Pittsburgh utility violated drinking water standards**

**BOB BAUDER** 🐦 (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Monday, April 25, 2016, 3:09 p.m.

The state Department of Environmental Protection on Monday cited the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority with violating safe drinking water standards by improperly switching the chemicals it uses to protect customers from lead.

A DEP official said a Tribune-Review story in January tipped off the department that PWSA used caustic soda from April 2014 to January instead of the soda ash required by its operating permit.

DEP officials stressed that the public faces no health risk based on a test conducted Friday at PWSA's water plant in Aspinwall, but they don't know whether the change affected lead levels at residential taps. PWSA switched back to soda ash in January.

"Did it have an adverse effect for 14 months? We don't know that because they don't have any samples yet from that 14-month period," said George Jugovic Jr., chief counsel for the environmental watchdog group Penn Future. "What you need are samples taken out in the distribution system at people's taps during that 14-month period to see if any changes took place."

That's impossible, according to PWSA's acting Executive Director David Donahoe.

He said DEP requires the authority to test at 50 separate residential taps across the PWSA system every three years. The last test was performed in 2013.

The Trib reported 2013 test results showed lead levels of 14.7 parts per billion, just below a federal warning threshold of 15 parts per billion. Friday's plant test indicated lead levels there of less than 1 part per billion.

"It's impossible to re-create the actual situation that occurred," Donahoe said, adding that the authority is cooperating with the DEP.

A DEP order requires PWSA to conduct two rounds of testing for lead and copper this year, provide the department with all sampling done since June 2013 and supply its customers with periodic notices about the results.

PWSA serves 300,000 customers in Pittsburgh and some surrounding municipalities, including Fox Chapel, Millvale, Aspinwall and Reserve.

The state Department of Health is monitoring lead levels in blood samples taken from Pittsburgh-area residents.

Department spokesman Neil Shader said PWSA could be fined.

"At this time we are not issuing a fine," he said, noting that a department investigation is continuing. "Whether or not we will in the future has yet to be determined."

DEP officials said PWSA changed chemicals because the cost of soda ash increased and equipment used to feed it into the water system was not operating properly. They also noted that an Allegheny County Health Department inspector checked the water plant in October and knew about the chemical switch but failed to report that PWSA was in violation.

The health department did not address the allegation in a statement.

"The Allegheny County Health Department, as part of its monitoring, reviews monthly operational reports from PWSA," it said. "The chemicals were both listed on the report and had not changed going back for quite some time. Any action that could or should have been taken would have been with the DEP and it is to that agency that your questions should be addressed."

Donahoe, who took over last month after former Executive Director Jim Good resigned, said he was not sure why the switch occurred.

"None of the people who made these decisions work here anymore, so it's hard for me to verify why they made them," he said.

DEP accepts caustic soda and soda ash as treatments for lead but considers the latter more effective because it provides a calcium-like protective coating on the inside of metal pipes to prevent lead from leaching into drinking water.


Donahoe said PWSA's permit allows the use of caustic soda, but only as a backup.

Bob Bauder is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (<mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com>).

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## W.Pa. doctors call for universal testing of children's lead levels

AARON AUPPERLEE  (<https://twitter.com/TinyNotebook>) | Sunday, May 15, 2016, 11:00 p.m.



*Justin Merriman | Tribune Review*

Dr. Scott Tyson, right, examines one-year-old Declan Metz of Imperial, as his mother, Kailey Fages holds him as she sits with her mother, Jackie Fages, at Pediatrics South Robinson on Wednesday, May 11, 2016. Dr. Tyson talked with them about testing for lead.

Dr. Scott Tyson wants every toddler who passes through his Pediatrics South practice to

have a blood test for lead.

He first brings up the test with parents at a child's 9-month appointment, giving them a slip to take to a lab where a technician will draw blood. He asks parents about the test three months later and another three months after that. He continues to ask until they get the test.

About one-tenth of 1 percent of the children in his practice, with offices in Mt. Lebanon, Robinson and Peters, has an elevated level of lead. But Tyson persists; the risk, however slight, is too high. Testing, Tyson said, is the best way to prevent and combat the debilitating effects of lead poisoning later in a child's life.

"It can be so devastating, and there are absolutely no signs of it. With early lead exposure, you see a healthy, healthy kid who just develops problems," Tyson said. "Testing is one of those things that should be a no-brainer."

The water crisis in Flint, Mich., has shoved concerns about lead back into the spotlight, and with it have come calls for universal testing of lead levels in children.

Maryland announced late last year it would adopt universal testing for 1- and 2-year-olds. Massachusetts and Rhode Island require universal testing.

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf supports universal testing and has been studying proposed legislation to implement it, said his spokesman, Jeff Sheridan. The state Department of Health wants universal testing of 1- and 2-year-olds, said Dr. Loren Robinson, the state Department of Health's deputy secretary for health promotion and disease prevention. The Allegheny County Health Department is examining what the county could do if the state does not act.

"After what happened in Flint, I think people are scared and parents are scared. They want to know that their children are safe," Robinson said. "We can never really say what our true rates of elevated blood levels are if we don't test every child."

About 25 percent of 1- and 2-year-olds were tested for lead, according to the state Department of Health's 2014 Childhood Lead Surveillance Annual Report, the most recent report available. But less than 14 percent of children in the state were tested for lead by their 7th birthdays, nearly 3 percent less than 2013, the report stated.

About 15 percent of children under 7 in Allegheny County and 39 percent of children in Pittsburgh were tested. Eleven percent of children in Westmoreland County were tested for lead.

### **CDC BEGS TO DIFFER**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics, however, do not advocate universal testing. The CDC recommends local health officials determine which children are at risk for high blood lead levels using local data and test those children, Bernadette Burden, an agency spokeswoman, wrote in a statement. If there is no data, then the CDC recommends universal blood lead testing of 1- and 2-year-olds, focusing on children in older houses and poverty.

Universal testing could overwhelm the health care system, said Dr. Jennifer Lowry, chief of toxicology at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo., and chair to the Council on Environmental Health for the American Academy of Pediatrics. A majority of children tested will test negative, which is good, but it could be seen as a waste of resources. Screening, when done effectively, can identify the at-risk children who should be tested.

"Every child should be screened, and if you have at least one 'yes' (answer to a) question, you should be tested," Lowry said, who worried that improper screening has dropped the number of children tested across the country to dangerously low levels. "We have no idea how many children are poisoned with lead."

Pediatricians should ask parents about the age of their homes, the age of other places — grandma's house, day care — where their children spent time, to see if there could be lead paint, which was banned in 1978. They should ask if children put non-food items in their mouths, like dirt or jewelry that could have lead. They should ask about whether the parents work at some jobs in battery and automotive plants, which can put children at risk. Hobbies such as fishing and pottery can also expose children to lead, Lowry said.

Some pediatricians use a finger-prick blood test to screen for lead, Lowry said. The test can show the prevalence of lead in a child's body but can also give a drastically high number if the child has lead on his or her hand, Lowry said.

#### **WHERE GREATEST RISK LIES**

Statewide, according to the Department of Health report, about 9 percent of children had levels of 5 micrograms per deciliter or above, the amount considered elevated by the CDC, which also states that there is no safe level of lead in children. About 7 percent of children in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties had lead levels at or above the CDC threshold and 8 percent of children in Pittsburgh hit or exceeded that mark.

While the number of children with elevated levels of lead in their blood has fallen by about 45 percent in the eight years covered by the Department of Health's report, the drop in the number of children tested — up from the 131,000 tested in 2007 but down from its peak in 2011 of nearly 151,000 to about 140,000 in 2014 — has health officials worried.

"That scares me," Tyson said of the drop in testing numbers. "It tends to be the urban poor and the rural areas that aren't getting tested, and I think the likelihood is you're going to find the higher risk there."

The 2014 lead surveillance report showed that 14 percent of children in urban areas and 11.5 percent of children in rural areas were tested. About 80 percent of the children with elevated lead levels lived in urban areas.

Lead paint in homes presents the greatest risk to children. As old paint flakes or crumbles, children can ingest it or inhale dust. Lead was banned in paint in 1978. About 70 percent of homes in Pennsylvania were built before 1978, ranking the state fifth in the country. Lead can also be present in the ground and the dirt that children sometimes put in their mouths. Lead poisoning from drinking water, which occurs when lead leaches from pipes and solder, while a concern, does not contribute as much to levels in children.

Tyson said for rural areas and among the urban poor, access to remediation services and health care can be scant.

"It's kind of a no-brainer for me because we have so many poor patients," said Dr. Hans Kersten, an attending physician at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in north Philadelphia and a professor of pediatrics at Drexel University, adding he can understand why a doctor in a more affluent part of town might now screen all children because the risk is lower. "But we really don't know unless they screen."

### **MANY GOING UNSCREENED**

Lead tests are covered by health insurance plans offered under the Affordable Care Act and on the state's exchange. Most private insurance plans cover tests as well.

Medicaid and the state's Children's Health Insurance Program cover and recommend lead tests for all children, said Mike Race, a vice president with the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. About 75 percent of children on Medicaid and 50 percent of children enrolled in CHIP were tested for lead, according to the 2013 statistics.

That's not good enough, Race said.

"We don't know how many kids in the state might not be getting a lead screening, but we do know that among the kids in public health insurance programs, there is a significant portion not being screened," Race said.

Dr. Karen Hacker, head of the Allegheny County Health Department, said there could be many reasons why children aren't screened for lead. Some pediatricians might decide not to screen based on questions they ask. Some parents might decide not to screen because they don't think there is a risk and they don't want to subject their children to a blood draw, which can be traumatic.

Jennifer and Peter Jezowicz didn't hesitate to have their children tested for lead. They had their Ingram house tested and inspected before they moved in, but when Dr. Tyson recommended a screening, they followed through. Neither Kamryn, 2, nor Kinsley, 1, had elevated levels in their blood.

And the peace of mind was worth the trauma.

"They cried," Jennifer Jezowicz said. "You get the beet-red face. You get the screaming. You get the tears, but it's an infant, and 10 minutes later they are fine. You have a bottle ready. You have a snack."

Aaron Aupperlee is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-320-7986 or [aaupperlee@tribweb.com](mailto:aaupperlee@tribweb.com) (mailto:aaupperlee@tribweb.com).

### **A change, more screening**

The Pennsylvania Department of Health analyzed the results of lead tests of children in the service area of the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority to see if a decision by the authority to change the chemical it uses to control corrosiveness of the water changed the number of children with elevated levels of lead in their blood.

PWSA switched from soda ash to caustic soda to control corrosion in April 2014. The state Department of Health analyzed lead test data from 2013, 2014 and 2015.

The analysis turned up nothing significant. The number of children with elevated lead levels in their blood those years followed statewide decreasing trends, said Penny Ickes, a spokeswoman for the department. Less than 8 percent of the children tested in 2013 had lead levels at 5 parts per billion or higher. In 2014 and 2015 it was less than 7 percent.

But each year, the number of children tested declined. In 2013, 2,643 children were tested. That number fell to 2,310 in 2014 and 2,066 in 2015, also mirroring a statewide trend.

"In order to adequately identify the risk of exposure for all children and to understand the degree of the problem of lead poisoning in Pennsylvania, there should be a universal testing requirement," Ickes wrote in an emailed statement.

The state Department of Environmental Protection cited PWSA in April for changing its chemicals without following proper procedures. Both are acceptable chemicals to control corrosion, but PWSA's operating permit specified the use of soda ash, which it resumed using in January. DEP has stressed the water poses no health risk but has ordered PWSA to complete two rounds of testing at 50 residential taps to determine the levels of lead in the water. The first round of sampling must be completed by June 30 and reported to DEP by July 10, said Neil Shader, a spokesman for the department.

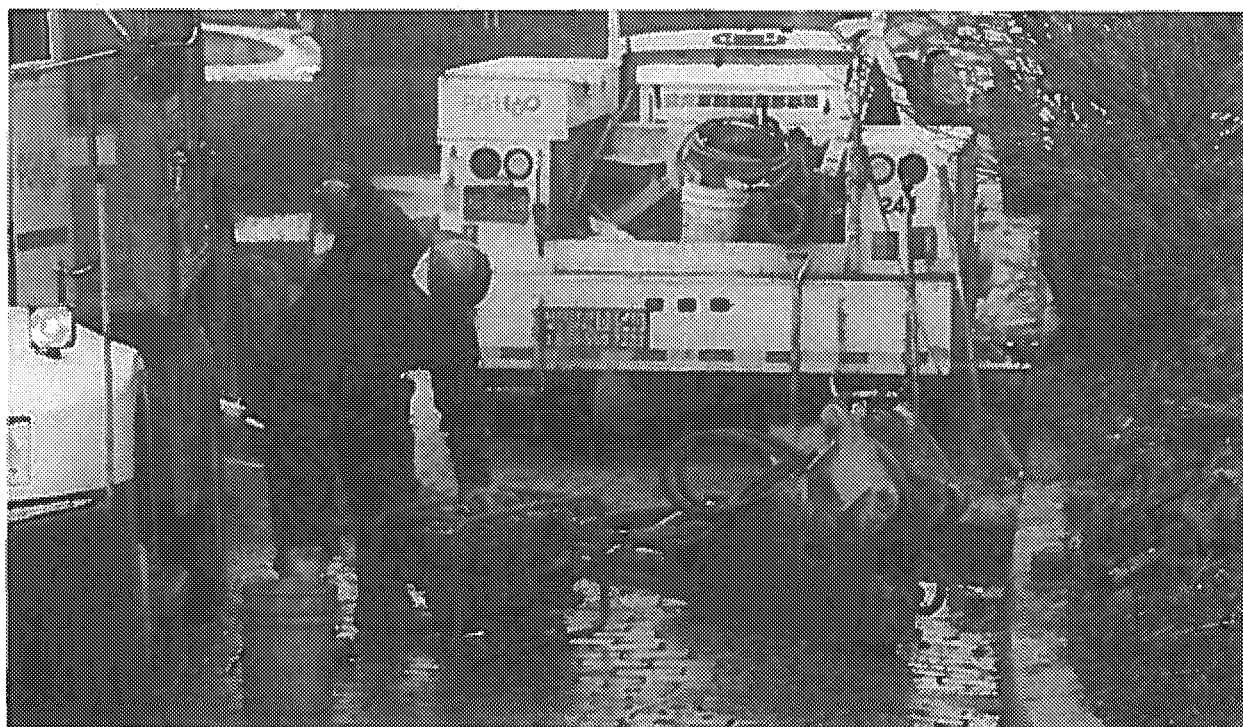
— *Aaron Aupperlee*

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## **PWSA to start replacing lead service lines when it finds them**

AARON AUPPERLEE [@TinyNotebook](https://twitter.com/TinyNotebook) | Friday, May 20, 2016, 1:03 p.m.



*Philip G. Pavely | Tribune-Review*

PWSA crews make emergency repairs to an 8-inch water main on Mt. Royal Road in Squirrel Hill on March 2, 2016.

The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority will test a plan to replace sections of lead service lines as crews find them, beginning in Lawrenceville next week.

The authority also will hire a new chief water quality officer, form a Water Quality Advisory Committee and conduct a corrosion-control study as part of a larger strategy announced Friday by David Donahoe, the PWSA's interim executive director.

The authority is responding to public concerns and a state Department of Environmental Protection citation related to the amount of lead in drinking water.

Donahoe said he did not know how much the measures will cost.

"I haven't really costed it out because it needs to be done," Donahoe said.

Alex Thomson, PWSA board chair, said he "wholeheartedly" supports the changes Donahoe proposed. The board appointed Donahoe to head the authority in March when former Executive Director Jim Good resigned. The DEP cited the PWSA last month for not informing the state it was switching the chemical it uses to control corrosion in pipes and prevent lead from leeching into the water supply.

The most recent lead test results showed that PWSA-supplied water had levels below but near the federal threshold of 15 parts per billion. DEP officials have ordered the PWSA to test for lead twice this year, once in June and once in December.

Recent DEP tests showed water leaving the PWSA treatment plant had no traces of lead. Lead enters the system as water flows through old pipes.

The DEP declined to comment on the authority's changes. Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto supports the efforts and appreciates Donahoe tackling the issue, Peduto spokesman Tim McNulty wrote in an email to the Tribune-Review.

Donahoe, the former head of the Allegheny Regional Asset District, came out of retirement to head the PWSA and said he won't be its permanent executive director. Thomson said the board hopes to hire a new executive director by the end of the summer.

Donahoe said the new chief water quality officer will provide "checks and balances" for the operation of the water plant and ensure a safe, clean supply. The position of director of water quality and production will be split into a director of water production and the chief water quality officer. The water quality officer will report directly to Donahoe and the board.

The board on Friday approved a revised lead service line replacement policy that requires the PWSA to replace any lead lines it finds while replacing or repairing pipes up to the curb box or property line. From there, the property owner is responsible for the line to the house, business or other structure.

The authority will work with homeowners to review options for replacing the rest of the service line, installing filters or taking other action. Donahoe said replacing service lines or installing filters is often much less expensive for homeowners if it's done when the PWSA is responsible for tearing up and replacing streets and sidewalks.

The authority will work with social service agencies and philanthropic organizations to find ways to help people pay for service line replacement.

The authority will collect sections of old lead pipes and run water treated with different chemicals — soda ash, which it uses now; caustic soda, which it switched to in April 2014 without prior DEP approval; and phosphates and silicates — to determine what works best to control corrosion.

Donahoe expects to present the members of the Water Quality Advisory Committee to the board next month. It will be made up of representatives from the Allegheny County Health Department, DEP, universities, technical consultants, plumbing and public health experts and a member of the authority's board.

The authority also will work with schools and other institutions to develop lead testing programs.

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## More than half of Pittsburgh water samples had no lead but 5% at or above fed limit

BOB BAUDER  (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Friday, July 1, 2016, 2:24 p.m.

Test results from nearly 400 water samples taken from homes of Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority customers show 5 percent contained lead levels at or above the federally accepted minimum while more than half contained none, an authority official said Friday.

David Donahoe, PWSA's interim executive director, said the authority has tested 393 samples submitted by customers for free testing since early this year. Twenty of those samples — 5 percent — had lead levels at or above the federally accepted minimum of 15 parts per billion (ppb).

The highest test result was 60 ppb, he said.

More than half of the samples contained no signs of lead, 18 percent contained 1 to 5 ppb, 13 percent had 5.1 to 9.9 ppb and 6 percent were at 10 to 14.9 ppb, Donahoe said.

PWSA has notified the customers of their results and is testing lead pipes to find the most effective way of preventing contamination through chemicals added to water.

"Those customers have been counseled about what they can do," Donahoe said, adding that the best thing for residents to do is to replace aging water pipes.

PWSA has no lead pipes, Donahoe said, so the financial responsibility for line improvements falls on customers.

Donahoe, who was joined by Mayor Bill Peduto, briefed reporters about steps PWSA is taking to address water quality and chronic billing and customer service problems.

Lead levels have increased from 2 ppb in 1999 to 14.7 ppb in 2013, according to the most recent testing information.

Peduto called the increase unacceptable and said the city would work to help homeowners.

"What you're seeing is an antiquated, over 100-year-old system that's beginning to show its age," he said. "When we find out the magnitude of the problem, we will create programs."

Billing problems have plagued PWSA since 2014, when it installed new electronic meter readers that did not communicate accurately with meters in homes and businesses, resulting in nearly 50,000 inaccurate bills.

Customers were not billed for months and complained bitterly about later receiving bills that sometimes amounted to thousands of dollars.

The PWSA call center was overwhelmed with complaints.

Donahoe said the authority overhauled its billing and customer service departments and has been billing correctly for the past three months. The authority is permitting customers to pay off bills through installments.

PWSA missteps have compounded the problems.

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection cited PWSA in April for not informing the state it switched the chemical used to prevent lead from leaching into its water. The state required PWSA to do system-wide testing, which it just completed. Samples have been sent for laboratory testing.

In its annual water quality report released June 1, the authority noted that it violated EPA regulations in 2015. PWSA failed to test a required 12 samples of drinking water for a mandatory disinfectant because samples broke on the way to a testing lab. EPA required PWSA to notify customers of the violation.

"All in all, there's been significant progress made," Donahoe said. "I do not want to put up the sign — 'Mission Accomplished' — because it's not over yet."

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## **Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority flubs federal testing requirement**

AARON AUPPERLEE 🐦 (<https://twitter.com/TinyNotebook>) | Wednesday, June 1, 2016, 11:00 p.m.

Water sample bottles that broke en route to a testing lab caused the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority to violate federal testing requirements last year, according to the authority's water quality report published online Wednesday.

PWSA now collects double the samples required to avoid such violations, said Brendan Schubert, a spokesman for the authority.

The water authority did not test the required 12 samples of water for haloacetic acids during the fourth quarter of last year.

"We failed to ensure all 12 sites were collected and reported and therefore cannot be sure of the quality of our drinking water during that time," the report stated.

The report stated there is no emergency and nothing customers need to do.

Haloacetic acids form when chlorine used to disinfect drinking water reacts with organic materials in the water. People who drink water with high amounts of haloacetic acid over several years might have an increased risk of cancer, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

"(Haloacetic acids) are seen in elevated levels in highly agricultural areas," Schubert wrote in an email to the Tribune-Review. "Historically, the Allegheny River has produced low levels of (them) for us here in Pittsburgh."

The EPA limit for haloacetic acids in drinking water is 60 parts per billion. PWSA's 2015 water quality report listed haloacetic acid levels at 21, within the federal requirements. The water authority violated the EPA's monitoring requirements, not the contaminant levels, Schubert said.

The EPA required PWSA to notify customers of the violation, which it did more than six months later on the final page of the authority's nine-page water quality report.

Two of the 12 samples broke en route to ALS Environmental lab in North Franklin, Washington County, according to the report and Schubert. ALS did not tell PWSA the bottles broke, and PWSA did not recollect the samples.

The ALS lab in North Franklin directed calls to a lab in Middletown. The lab director in Middletown did not return calls.

PWSA now collects double the samples and communicates with the lab on all samples for regulatory compliance, Schubert said. PWSA was not fined because of the violation.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection cited PWSA in April for not informing the state it was switching the chemical it uses to control corrosion in pipes and prevent lead from leeching into the water supply. The state, in part, required PWSA to complete more thorough testing of lead in its water.

The results of those tests are not included in the online report. That report uses 2013 tests, the most recent available, which show a lead level of 14.8 parts per billion, just below the federal threshold of 15 parts per billion. Past reports from the 2013 tests have shown lead levels of 14.7 parts per billion. The actual results show levels of 14.77 parts per billion, and regulators asked PWSA to round up this year, Schubert said.

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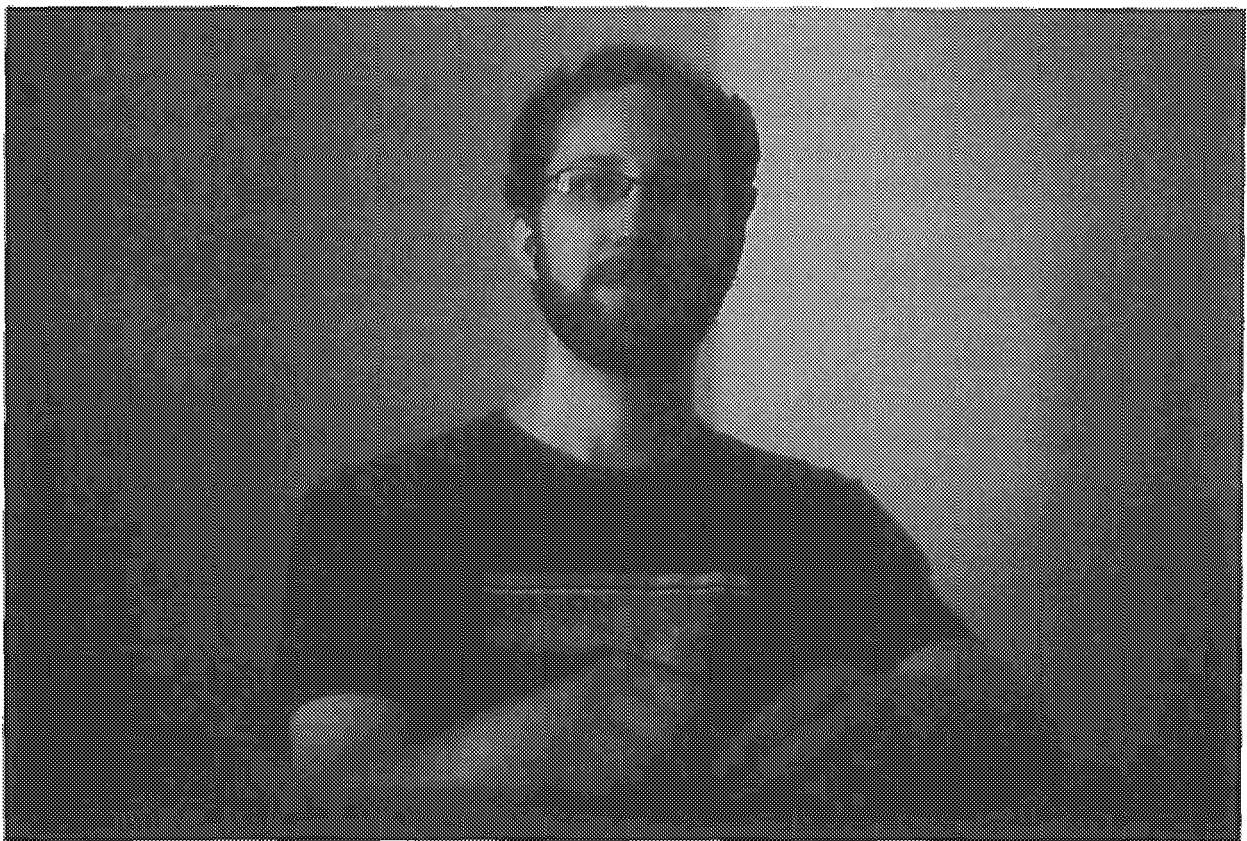
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## New, simpler water test to detect lead draws accuracy questions

AARON AUPPERLEE [🐦 \(https://twitter.com/TinyNotebook\)](https://twitter.com/TinyNotebook) | Saturday, July 9, 2016, 9:48 a.m.



*Justin Merriman | Tribune Review*

"If you only do a one-bottle test, and it turns out high, you don't know where the problem is," Michael Coblenz of Squirrel Hill said. Coblenz had the pipes replaced and is hoping the next test returns with negative results for lead in the water.

Michael Coblenz made a mistake the first time he tested his Squirrel Hill home for lead.

Coblentz, concerned about the effects of lead on his 3-year-old child, requested a test kit in January, and the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority sent him one with four bottles.

He let his water sit for six to 10 hours and filled bottle one right after turning on the tap. The instructions told him to fill bottle two immediately after filling bottle one.

Before filling bottle three, he had to run the water until he noticed a change in its temperature and then let the water run for at least two minutes more.

This is where Coblentz, 33, a Carnegie Mellon University student pursuing a Ph.D. in computer science, ran into trouble.

"I waited two minutes, and I didn't know if it was cold enough," he said.

Coblentz filled the third bottle, tested the water temperature with a kitchen thermometer and dumped it when he thought it wasn't cold enough. He let the water run until the temperature changed and refilled bottle No. 3.

Then, he let the water run for another three minutes and filled the fourth bottle, following PWSA's instructions.

"I could see how an easier test could be useful," Coblentz said.

PWSA agrees. The water authority abandoned the four-bottle test that tripped up Coblentz and switched, first to a two-bottle test and then to a one-bottle test by March, said Brendan Schubert, a PWSA spokesman. The one-bottle test used by PWSA now asks customers to not use their water for six to 10 hours and then take a sample from the tap immediately after turning it on.

That's it — one bottle, one sample.

Water-quality researchers worry that cutting the number of samples in each test will cut the amount of information gathered. Marc Edwards, a Virginia Tech researcher that probed Flint's water, said that while the federal Lead and Copper Rule, which limits the amount of lead and copper allowed in the water, requires testing with only one bottle, proposed revisions to the rule call for two bottles.

"Many other cities are adding a second bottle now, because that is how you identify a water lead problem coming from the lead service line," Edwards wrote in an email to the Tribune-Review. "The net effect of sampling one bottle instead of two or four is to dramatically reduce the likelihood of identifying lead. ..."

Schubert said PWSA worked with the Allegheny County Health Department and other regulators on the one-bottle test. He said PWSA hopes the simpler test will decrease confusion and errors by customers and return results in a more timely manner.

Requests for the test kits spiked from 25 to 50 per year to more than 400 in two months at the beginning of 2016 after the Tribune-Review reported lead levels in homes in the authority's service area were approaching federal limits. The Environmental Protection Agency sets a threshold at 15 parts per billion. PWSA tests in 2013, the most recent data available, found lead levels at 14.7 parts per billion.

PWSA on July 1 released recent water samples from nearly 400 homes that showed more than half with no detectable levels of lead and 5 percent at or above the federal limit.

Lead isn't in the water when it leaves PWSA's treatment plant, and the authority has no lead pipes in its system. Lead leaches into the water when it passes through lead service mains or over lead solder inside homes.

Partha Basu, a researcher at Duquesne University, said two or four samples taken at different times can show where the lead may be coming from. A first draw tests the water sitting in the faucet. Letting the water run can test water in the internal plumbing, the lead service line and main service pipes.

"The more information we get is always better," Basu said.

Coblentz is torn about which test is better. The one-bottle test, which PWSA sent him recently to retest his water, is certainly easier. The four-bottle test, however, gave him more information.

The first two bottles from Coblentz's first test showed lead levels of 13 parts per billion. The third, salvaged by the lab despite his mistake, showed a lead level of 62 parts per billion. The fourth showed 6 parts per billion.

"If you only do a one-bottle test, and it turns out high, you don't know where the problem is," Coblentz said. "If we had done a one-bottle test, it would have been 13 and that would be the end of story."

It wasn't the end of the story for Coblentz. He tested his water twice more and decided to replace his lead service line and install a water filter. The service line work cost him \$4,500 and the filter cost him \$80.

PWSA recently sent him a one-bottle test kit to follow up. He hasn't gotten around to completing the tests but expects the numbers to be very low.

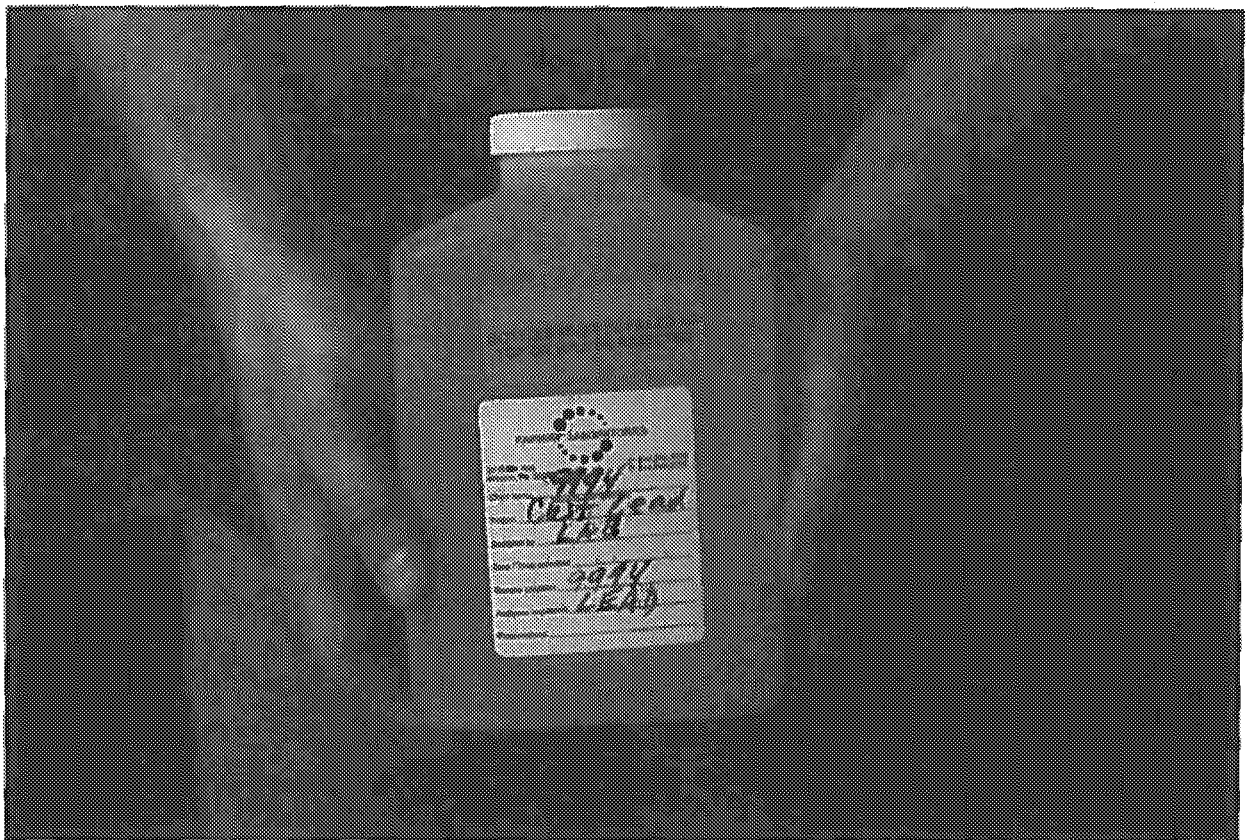
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## Lead levels in PWSA drinking water samples exceed EPA threshold

AARON AUPPERLEE [@TinyNotebook](#) | Tuesday, July 12, 2016, 2:54 p.m.



*Justin Merriman | Tribune Review*

A water test for lead in 2016.

Drinking water lead levels in Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority's service area exceeded a key federal regulatory threshold, the authority reported Tuesday.

Seventeen of the 100 water samples voluntarily collected from homes in May and June had lead levels greater than 15 parts per billion, a limit set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

PWSA's 90th percentile result, which will be reported to the EPA and included in annual water quality reports, was 22 parts per billion.

PWSA will have to notify customers of the test results, develop educational materials about the dangers of lead and how to make sure water is safe, test different methods of controlling lead corrosion and replace lead service lines it maintains. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection will oversee the work required of PWSA.

"This is a serious concern, and DEP will be working with PWSA to inform and educate consumers of the risks of lead in drinking water, and find solutions to reduce the lead levels in the water," acting DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell said in a release. "The top priority is to return the system to below the action level as quickly as possible."



**Pennsylvania DEP**  
@PennsylvaniaDEP

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NEWSROOM UPDATE: DEP Will Require PWSA to Implement Measures to Address Lead in Drinking Water [bit.ly/29Bj6LF](http://bit.ly/29Bj6LF)

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David Donahoe, interim executive director of PWSA, said the test results do not mean that the authority has violated federal regulations regarding lead levels.

"It does trigger other requirements," Donahoe said during a news conference. "This information does confirm that where lead service lines exist there is a slightly higher percentage of incidents of additional lead in the water."



**Aaron Aupperlee**  
@tinynotebook

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2:55 PM - 12 Jul 2016

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Donahoe encouraged anyone in PWSA's service area who doesn't know if they have lead plumbing or lead in their water to have their water tested. PWSA provides tests to customers at no charge.

Five percent of nearly 400 customers who have requested tests have shown results above 15 parts per billion.

Donahoe said lead levels have concerned him since he started at PWSA in March.

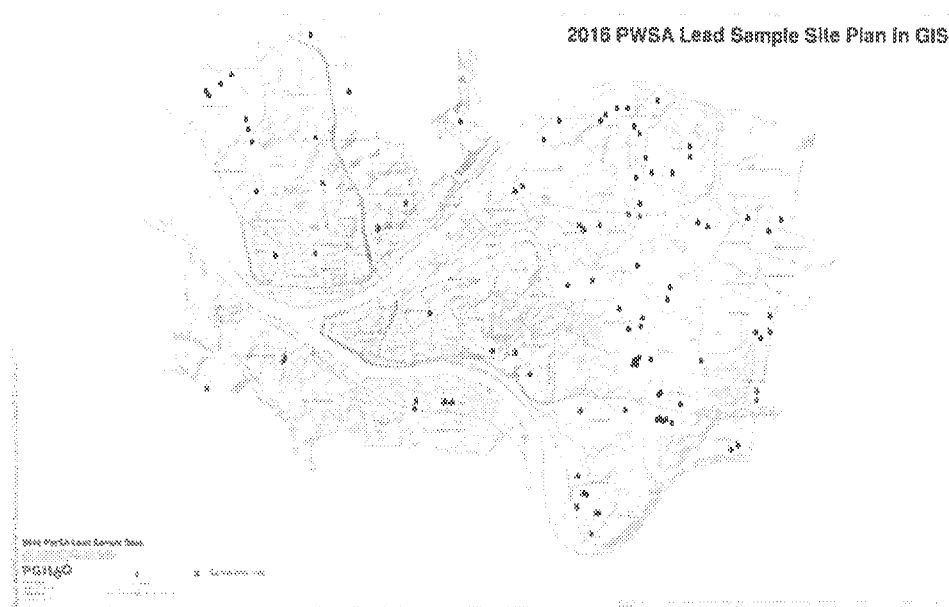
In May, he directed the authority's board of directors to take steps to reduce lead in the water. Some of the steps – including testing various anti-corrosion chemicals to keep lead from leaching from pipes – will now be required. The DEP will also require PWSA to identify all lead service lines the authority owns and begin a program to replace at least 7 percent of the lines each year. Donahoe said the authority doesn't know the extent of the lead service lines and is conducting a survey to identify them.

Alex Thomson, chairman of PWSA's board, did not return calls for comment.

"These results were expected, and the PWSA is already at work addressing the issues and communicating with residents, as the DEP has requested," Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto said in email to the Trib. "All this means is the authority has to follow some actions to address lead, which it is already doing."

PWSA will conduct another round of testing in December because the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection cited the authority in April for changing anti-corrosion chemicals without following proper procedures.

Recent DEP tests showed water leaving the PWSA treatment plant had no trace of lead. Lead enters the system as water flows through old lead pipes or pipes with soldering that contains lead.



**Aaron Aupperlee**  
@linynotebook

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Map showing where @pgh2o collected water samples for the latest lead tests. My story --> [triblive.com/news/adminpage...](http://triblive.com/news/adminpage...)

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The EPA requires water providers to test for lead levels in water every three years. If 10 percent of all the samples test above 15 parts per billion, the water providers must take additional action.

PWSA's 90th percentile results have crept up in the last 15 years. In 2001, the tests showed a level of 6 parts per billion. By 2013, that level had risen to 14.8 parts per billion.

The results of the 2016 testing were highly anticipated after the 2013 were just below the 15 parts per billion threshold, which increased scrutiny of lead in public drinking water in the wake of the crisis in Flint, Mich.

## Sample results

PWSA collected 100 voluntary water samples from homes suspected of having lead service lines or plumbing in May and June. Those tests were sent to an independent lab for review. Of the 100 tests:

- 45 had non-detectable levels of lead
- 15 were between 2.1 and 4.6 parts per billion (ppb)
- 7 were between 5 and 9.8 ppb
- 16 were between 10 and 14 ppb
- 6 were between 16 and 19 ppb
- 7 were between 22 and 38 ppb
- 4 were between 50 and 75 ppb

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## Brown water safe to drink, Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority tells Aspinwall

BOB BAUDER 🐦 (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Thursday, July 21, 2016, 11:40 p.m.

Aspinwall residents say they've complained for weeks about tap water from the Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority that's developed a brownish tint.

PWSA is replacing filtering beds at its water treatment plant near Aspinwall and blamed the discoloration on elevated levels of non-hazardous manganese passing through new filters. The authority issued a statement saying it is "fine tuning" the filters and using chlorine to reduce manganese levels in water it gets from the Allegheny River.

"Once the right balance is achieved, the discoloration will dissipate," spokeswoman Rachel Rampa said.

The sooner the better, Aspinwall residents said.

"I buy my water for the kids to drink," said Sydnie Bryant, 42. "We don't drink the water, but you're still taking a shower in it."

Manganese is a mineral that occurs naturally in groundwater. The Environmental Protection Agency does not consider it a health hazard, according to the agency website. Levels exceeding 0.05 milligrams per liter of water can produce black to brown discoloration and a bitter, metallic taste, according to the EPA.

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection spokesman John Poister said the mineral is common in Western Pennsylvania tap water.

"The water is safe to drink," Poister said, adding that he sometimes experiences the problem at his home in Sewickley. "It just doesn't look good."

He said the DEP has received no complaints about Aspinwall tap water. Neither has the Allegheny County Health Department, spokeswoman Melissa Wade said.

Aspinwall Manager Melissa Lang O'Malley said about 40 residents from across the borough have called her office over several weeks.

Borough officials plan to meet with PWSA in an attempt to determine the cause, she said.

Vicki Cavanaugh, 73, said she notices the discoloration appears sporadically in her bathtub and toilets.

"It's very light brown," she said. "It's not dark, but it's yuck."

Her husband, Jim, 73, said he's a little concerned because he drinks tap water daily.


"I have faith in the borough and the water authority," he said. "At no time have they said don't drink it."

Bob Bauder is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (<mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com>).

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## PWSA hires new executive director

BOB BAUDER  (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Wednesday, July 27, 2016, 4:33 p.m.

The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority board of directors on Wednesday voted unanimously to hire a county administrator from Virginia with experience in water and sewer management as executive director at an annual salary of \$190,000.

Kenneth Charles Griffin will replace former Executive Director Jim Good, who resigned in March amid mounting complaints from customers about inaccurate billing and poor service.

PWSA interim Executive Director David Donahoe and board members declined to identify Griffin's current employer immediately after the vote, saying only that he serves in a "public sector high level position."

The website for King William County, Va., identifies Griffin as its administrator in charge of daily county operations. It's about 35 miles northeast of Richmond and has a population of 16,354. Griffin could not be reached for comment.

Griffin's start date at PWSA has not been determined. Donahoe said he would remain until Griffin arrives and assist on a volunteer basis with transition.

Board members cited Griffin's experience in water and sewer systems and a positive, problem-solving attitude as the reason they chose him from among 15 initial candidates.

"He has extensive experience in this business, both in water and waste water systems," Donahoe said. "He has a really strong educational background, but most of all, he had this positive attitude about getting problems solved."

Griffin is a professional engineer and has served as director of operations and management for public utilities in Hillsborough County, Fla., and as executive director of the Pearl River Valley Water Supply District in Jackson, Miss., according to PWSA.

He has a bachelor's degree from the University of California, Irvine, master's degrees from Cornell University and the University of Southern California and a doctorate from the University of Mississippi.

A PWSA search committee including Donahoe, board Chairman Alex Thompson and members Paul Leger and Karen Glotfelty recommended Griffin's hiring after interviewing three finalists.

He will earn \$50,000 less than Good, whose salary was \$240,000.

"We thought that was the best salary for the size of this operation," Leger said.

PWSA supplies water and sewer services to more than 300,000 customers in Pittsburgh and the surrounding region.

Bob Bauder is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-765-2312.


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<http://triblive.com/news/allegheeny/10868163-74/griffin-board-pwsa>

## Questions swirl over new PWSA director's firing from previous job

BOB BAUDER  (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Thursday, July 28, 2016, 8:03 p.m.



<http://kingwilliamcounty.us/>

K. Charles Griffin

The newly hired head of the Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority told officials that he resigned from a similar job in South Carolina, but a document from his previous employer indicates he was fired.

Minutes from a meeting Jan. 25, 2013, of the Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority board of directors say the board unanimously voted to terminate the employment of K. Charles Griffin, who served as the authority's general manager. The minutes are posted on the authority's website. They don't provide a reason for the dismissal.

Local newspaper accounts said the board gave no explanation for its action.

Allena Lee-Brown, human resources manager for the authority based in Okatie, S.C., said she was not permitted to release information about former employees.

The PWSA board on Wednesday voted unanimously to hire Griffin at a yearly salary of \$190,000. He currently is county administrator for King William County, Va., near Richmond.

Griffin did not return several phone messages seeking comment.

PWSA interim Executive David Donahoe said he learned of the conflicting accounts Thursday morning and spoke with Griffin several times. He said Griffin assured him that he resigned from the South Carolina authority.

Donahoe said Griffin never mentioned the firing in interviews, and it did not turn up in reference and background checks.

"The board had reference checks done," Donahoe said. "They did a full background check. All of that stuff cleared."

Donahoe said he didn't know why meeting minutes or newspaper stories available via an Internet search wouldn't show up in a background check.

He couldn't immediately name the company retained by PWSA's Human Resources Department to do the work.

"Obviously, this was not included," he said. "I'm not sure why that is."

Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto issued a statement demanding full accountability from the PWSA board about the vetting and hiring of Griffin.

"If there are any errors or inconsistencies, the public deserves immediate and full disclosure from the board and (Griffin), including a complete and detailed explanation of the circumstances regarding any possible error or omission," Peduto said.

Pittsburgh City Councilwoman Deb Gross of Highland Park, who is on the PWSA board, also said she was unaware of Griffin's firing.

She said Griffin's resume indicates he is a licensed engineer with extensive experience in water and sewer systems. The resume includes his job at the Beaufort-Jasper Water & Sewer Authority, where he worked from 2011-13, according to the resume.

"We felt that was a good combination," Gross said. "We live on a daily basis with infrastructure problems and repairs."

Bob Bauder is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com).



## New PWSA director withdraws amid questions over his resume

BOB BAUDER [✉](https://twitter.com/BobBauder) (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Tuesday, Aug. 2, 2016, 9:27 a.m.



<http://kingwilliamcounty.us/>

K. Charles Griffin

The Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority has four weeks to find an executive director now that its first choice has withdrawn amid questions about his firing from a similar job in South Carolina.

The board of directors last week voted to hire K. Charles Griffin, but Griffin gave notice Monday in a one-sentence email before starting work. It gives the board little time to find a replacement because interim Executive Director David Donahoe is scheduled to leave Aug. 31.

Mayor Bill Peduto on Tuesday called Griffin's hiring a "mistake."

"There really is no reason why something like that couldn't be found when a simple Google check would have brought it up," the mayor said. "I try not to interfere with (Pittsburgh) authorities ... but when mistakes like this happen, we have to be involved."

Griffin has not returned messages seeking comment.

PWSA board members are appointed by the mayor but operate separately from city government.

Peduto said he has asked the board to draw from the remaining pool of two finalists to find a candidate for the position.

"There are other good candidates that were also looked at," Peduto said. "I've asked the board to pursue those instead of doing another search. Hopefully, we can get a director in place sometime soon."

PWSA paid Downtown-based KlinkCheck Inc. \$388 to perform background checks, according to PWSA spokesman Brendan Schubert. A woman who answered the phone at KlinkCheck headquarters said no one was available to comment.

"Obviously, there's going to be a lot more background checks that will be in place," Peduto said about future hiring at PWSA.

PWSA issued a statement saying it is "evaluating options," but board members reached by the Tribune-Review said they are unsure how the search might proceed.

Board Chairman Alex Thomson, an attorney at Downtown law firm Houston Harbaugh, declined to comment late Tuesday. Earlier in the day, a receptionist at the firm's headquarters in 3 Gateway Center said Thomson was out of the office and not available.

"We definitely need leadership to maintain the level of services we're providing," said Pittsburgh City Councilwoman Deb Gross of Highland Park, a PWSA board member.

Board Treasurer Paul Leger, the city finance director, said PWSA will not pay Griffin a severance or settlement because he had not started.

PWSA directors July 27 voted unanimously to hire Griffin at a yearly salary of \$190,000. He is county administrator for King William County, Va., near Richmond.

Questions about his background arose a day after his hiring. Public documents showed he was fired from a similar post in South Carolina. Griffin told PWSA officials he had resigned.

Online minutes from a meeting Jan. 25, 2013, of the Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority board of directors say the board voted unanimously to terminate the employment of Griffin, who served as the authority's general manager.

Local newspaper accounts said the board gave no explanation for its action.

Donahoe said last week that Griffin did not mention the firing during interviews, and it did not turn up in reference and background checks.

Bob Bauder is a staff writer for Trib Total Media. He can be reached at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (<mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com>).

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## PWSA wants to pick interim director soon

BOB BAUDER 🐦 (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2016, 11:00 p.m.

The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority is planning to name an interim executive director next week, an authority official said.

Alex Thomson, who chairs the PWSA board of directors, said members have yet to find a permanent replacement for Jim Good, who resigned in March.

He said the board likely will meet Sept. 1 to hire another interim director.

It would mark the second time since Good's resignation that the board has appointed someone to lead the authority on a temporary basis.

David Donahoe, who has served as acting director, is leaving Aug. 31 because of a prior commitment.

The board on July 27 voted to hire K. Charles Griffin, county administrator for King William County, Va., near Richmond, at a yearly salary of \$190,000. Griffin withdrew after questions arose one day later about his firing from a similar post in South Carolina.

PWSA officials said Griffin told them he resigned as director of the Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority, but online meeting minutes from the authority's website indicate he was terminated in 2013 without explanation.

Mayor Bill Peduto at the time called Griffin's hiring a mistake and urged the board to consider the other two finalists for the position.


PWSA spokesman Brendan Schubert said the board is doing that and "talking to other people" about the job.

PWSA supplies water and sewer services to more than 300,000 customers in Pittsburgh and the surrounding region.

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## PWSA, state officials tackle lead levels in Pittsburgh-area water

JASON CATO  (<https://twitter.com/Jac412Cato>) | Wednesday, Aug. 31, 2016, 10:45 p.m.



*Stephanie Strasburg | Tribune-Review*

Acting Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Patrick McDonnell speaks to the media at the DEP Southwest Regional Office in Washington's Landing on Wednesday, Aug. 31, 2016.

Local and state officials hope to have a better idea by year's end about which homes in Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority's service area have high levels of lead, the head of the

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection said Wednesday.

Then they hope to develop a plan to deal with the problem.

"Obviously, there's a lot of work to do there," acting DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell said.

The primary objectives are identifying lines that leach excessive lead and coming up with a way to cover the cost of replacing those lines — an expense that can average \$3,000 to \$5,000 and falls on homeowners, McDonnell said.

In May and June, PWSA voluntarily collected 100 water samples from homes in its service area and found 17 that had lead levels greater than 15 parts per billion, a threshold set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA requires water providers to test water for lead every three years. If 10 percent of the samples test above 15 parts per billion, the water providers must take additional action.

The authority plans to conduct another 100 water samples in December, spokesman Brendan Schubert said.

"We have been very open that we don't know where all of our lead service lines are and how much this is going to cost," Schubert said. "We are actively working to identify those lines and are coming up with a demonstration project in the fall to locate the lines."

PWSA supplies water and sewer services to more than 300,000 customers in Pittsburgh and the surrounding region. The authority provides lead tests to customers at no charge.

PWSA is working to notify customers and develop educational materials about the dangers of lead and how to make sure water is safe. It is testing methods of controlling lead corrosion and replacing lead service lines it maintains. DEP is overseeing the process.

"They've been cooperative throughout," McDonnell said. None of the lead contamination is coming from the PWSA plant, he said.

Lead enters the system as water flows through old lead pipes or pipes with soldering that contains lead, he said.

PWSA's 90th percentile results have increased over the past 15 years — from 6 parts per billion in 2001 to 14.8 in 2013 and 22 parts per billion in 2016.

DEP officials want PWSA to map its system to identify trouble areas.

"Right now, they cannot tell us where all their lead distribution lines are," DEP spokesman John Poister said. "Once they know that, we'll have a better handle on who and how many customers are affected."


With lead levels where they are, PWSA is tasked with persuading 7 percent of customers to voluntarily replace lead-laden lines each year. There is no state or federal funding to help cover those costs, McDonnell said.

"We don't have a solution at this point for how to replace the service lines," he said.

Jason Cato is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-320-7936 or [jcato@tribweb.com](mailto:jcato@tribweb.com) (<mailto:jcato@tribweb.com>).



## PWSA hires retiring Army Corps colonel as interim director

BOB BAUDER  (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Thursday, Sept. 1, 2016, 10:00 a.m.



Bernard R. Lindstrom was named Thursday, Sept. 1, 2016, as the interim executive director of the Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority.

The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority on Thursday hired a decorated U.S. Army veteran who headed the Corps of Engineers' Pittsburgh District as interim executive director.

Col. Bernard Lindstrom, 48, of Upper St. Clair will start on Sept. 12 after mustering out of the Army following a 25-year career. PWSA's board of directors unanimously approved a six-month contract with Lindstrom at a salary of \$16,667 per month. Director Deb Gross, a Pittsburgh city councilwoman, abstained, saying she hasn't had a chance to meet and speak to Lindstrom.

"We think the combination of his experience, management side, as well as his technical experience in dealing with the issues that our waterways face will suit him well to serve in this position," said Alex Thomson, who chairs the board.

Members appointed Robert Weimer, PWSA's acting director of engineering and construction, to serve as acting executive director with no salary increase until Lindstrom arrives.

PWSA has been without a permanent leader since Jim Good resigned in March. David Donahoe, former director of the Allegheny County Regional Asset District, had served as interim director since then. Donahoe stepped down on Wednesday because of a prior commitment.

Directors voted in late July to appoint K. Charles Griffin, a county administrator in Virginia, as executive director, but he withdrew after questions surfaced about his termination from a similar position in South Carolina.

Griffin told PWSA he resigned from the Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority, but online authority meeting minutes the Tribune-Review found through an Internet search indicated he was fired.

PWSA Director Paul Leger, who also serves as Pittsburgh's finance director, said he personally searched the Internet for information about Lindstrom.

"I Googled him 10 pages deep," Leger said.

Thompson said the board intends to name a permanent director by April through a "robust and full search." He said Mayor Bill Peduto's office recommended Lindstrom and the board chose him after conducting an evaluation.

"We did a much more detailed background search on Mr. Lindstrom than we did on Dr. Griffin," he said. "We certainly want to learn from Dr. Griffin's process, and we'll hopefully take those lessons and apply them to this next (search for a permanent director)."

He said Lindstrom, who was not available, expressed interest in the job.

"Our hope and expectation is he will (apply)," Thomson said. "We think his qualifications would suit him well as the permanent executive director."

In a separate, related development Peduto announced he is creating a committee to study PWSA and recommend solutions to "critical issues" including customer service, billing, flood control and stormwater management.

Lindstrom's Army career stretched from the Middle East to Pittsburgh. His military awards includes a Bronze Star medal awarded by the Army for heroic or meritorious service or achievement.


He was born in Monroeville and moved at a young age to Fayette County. He is a graduate of Connellsville High School and has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Mercer University and master's degrees in business administration and strategic studies from Benedictine College and the U.S. Army War College, respectively.

In addition to overseeing 328 miles of navigable waterways in the Pittsburgh District, he's headed the Army Corps' Civil Works division in Washington, and the Nashville, Tenn., district. He's served as chief of plans and operations for United States Forces in Korea and led engineering teams in various posts across the globe, including Iraq and Romania.

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## PWSA leader prepared to tackle troubles

BOB BAUDER  (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Sunday, Sept. 18, 2016, 11:05 p.m.



Bernard R. Lindstrom was named Thursday, Sept. 1, 2016, as the interim executive director of the Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority.

Bernard Lindstrom knew the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority had deep-rooted problems when he applied for the job of acting executive director.

The decorated Army veteran faced plenty of those during a 28-year career in the Corps of Engineers, most recently as head engineer for the Corp's Pittsburgh District. He retired as a colonel in July.

Lindstrom wasn't sure on Wednesday — his third day on the job — how he might go about fixing the chronically ailing PWSA, but he said he is up to the challenge.

"For the past seven years, I have been leading organizations that deal directly with water management on the national level," Lindstrom said. "The Army prepared me well for this job."

He said PWSA's problems, particularly infrastructure dating back 100 years, are not insurmountable. He plans a triage method of addressing them.

"Just because you have an old car, you don't get rid of it," he said. "Also, you don't go fixing everything that's wrong with it. You don't fix the crack in the dashboard, you don't fix the crack in the seat. If the brakes need replaced, you replace the brakes. We need to do that same approach with our infrastructure, and we need to understand the risk of those things failing."

Local water experts who have worked with him say he knows how to get things done.

"At an organization which has had some instability over a period of time, he will bring stability and also, I think, innovation to the PWSA," said Vivien Li, president and CEO of Riverlife, which worked closely with Lindstrom during the nearly four years he headed the Pittsburgh District. "He's really a good professional with experience in water engineering, and he understands how government organizations work."

"He's nice to people who are not at his level, entry-level people," Li said. "I think that says something about a person's character. He has a way and style that allows him to talk to everyone in a way that's respectful and open."

Lindstrom is a local product. He grew up in Monroeville and moved with his family to Fayette County. He is a 1986 graduate of Connellsville Area High School and joined the Army ROTC program after graduation.

He said he picked engineering and the Army Corps because he liked to tinker.

"I decided I wanted to be an engineer when I was 16 years old," he said. "I was one of those kids who used to rebuild motorcycles and rebuild dune buggies. My dad says, 'Hey you can either be a mechanic, or you can be an engineer, your choice.'"

He has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Mercer University and master's degrees in business administration and strategic studies from Benedictine College and the U.S. Army War College, respectively.

His Army career has taken him from the Middle East to Korea, Washington, D.C., and back to his hometown.

"He was always very supportive," said Jan Oliver, director of regional conveyance at Alcosan. "He liked very much being involved in projects. It will fit him well in his new role with PWSA."

Lindstrom, who has a six-month contract and is being paid \$16,667 per month, said he plans to apply for the permanent position.

"I'm honored to serve in this capacity," he said. "Being selected to serve the city of Pittsburgh and its residents to deliver quality water is just a great place to be."

Bob Bauder is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-765-2312 or [bbauder@tribweb.com](mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com) (<mailto:bbauder@tribweb.com>).


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<http://triblive.com/news/alleggheny/11170921-74/lead-customers-labs>

## **PWSA announces new process for handling lead test kit requests**

MADASYN CZEBINIAK  (<https://twitter.com/MaddyCzebsTrib>) | Monday, Sept. 19, 2016, 8:21 p.m.

The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority announced Monday it is implementing a streamlined process for handling lead test kit requests, saying it “will improve the integration of lead test data gathered from the certified contract labs” and enable the authority to provide “more accurate and timely feedback to customers.”

According to an authority news release:

- All calls for tests will be automatically routed through the Customer Service Department and forwarded to the PWSA lab for processing.
- Three contract labs will be used to analyze samples as opposed to two.
- The authority will use a mail courier service, provided by the contract labs. The labs will ship lead test sample kits directly to customers. After customers collect samples, they will send the kit back to the lab for analysis using prepaid postage via the courier service.
- The labs will issue customers and the PWSA sample results, and PWSA will send customers who have lead in their water a letter “including information with options for mitigating lead exposure from water infrastructure.”


PWSA plans to hire a person “dedicated to increasing public educational outreach on infrastructure and water quality, and improve public relations for the integration of water quality, government relations, and engineering efforts.”

Madasyn Czebiniak is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach her at 412-320-7822 or [mczebiniak@tribweb.com](mailto:mczebiniak@tribweb.com) (<mailto:mczebiniak@tribweb.com>).

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## **Pittsburgh Water & Sewer files lawsuit against former management firm**

MATTHEW SANTONI  (<https://twitter.com/MSantoni>) | Wednesday, Oct. 12, 2016, 11:15 a.m.

Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority filed an arbitration lawsuit Wednesday against the company that ran the utility's operations for more than three years, claiming it created problems such as faulty automated water meters and a change in corrosive chemicals that led to a state violation.

PWSA is seeking damages not anticipated to exceed the \$12.5 million the authority already paid or still owes Boston-based Veolia Water North America-Northeast, which had a management contract with PWSA from July 12, 2012, to Dec. 31, 2015, the suit states.

"They represented to us they had this world-class expertise at running water authorities," said Alex Thomson, chairman of PWSA's board of directors. "We just don't believe they managed the authority as required in their contract."

In a statement, the company said the authority's action was "inflammatory" and "nothing more than an effort to redirect blame for their failures and not fulfill their contractual obligations to Veolia."

Thomson said PWSA would seek to recover as much as possible of what it paid Veolia, and would use that money back to offset authority rate increases.

The lawsuit was filed with the American Arbitration Association, a New York-based nonprofit for resolving corporate disputes outside of court, PWSA spokesman Will Pickering said. Veolia's contract with PWSA required that disputes go through arbitration, Thomson said.

"PWSA asserts that Veolia grossly mismanaged PWSA's operations, abused its positions of special trust and confidence, and misled and deceived PWSA as part of its efforts to maximize profits for itself to the unfair detriment of PWSA and its customers," PWSA officials said in a release announcing the arbitration suit.

Among the issues alleged in the announcement — but not included in the formal filing with the Arbitration Association — PWSA said Veolia was responsible for the botched rollout of automated water meters, inaccurate water bills and a 14-month change in chemicals for corrosion and lead control that violated PWSA's operating permit from the state.

"Veolia met its obligations and fulfilled the requirements of our contract in a fully transparent manner," the company stated. "We stand behind the work performed on behalf of PWSA and strongly urge PWSA to stop trying to blame others for their failures and fulfill their obligations under the contract with Veolia."

Water samples in 2013 showed lead levels had climbed to 14.7 parts per billion, just below a federal Environmental Protection Agency warning threshold.

Seventeen of 100 homes tested this spring, after Veolia's contract expired, had lead levels exceeding the 15 parts per billion limit. PWSA was receiving more lead test requests than usual from customers in the wake of the Flint, Mich., water crisis.

"Veolia's not responsible for the lead issue PWSA has — these lead issues are the result of the fact we have 75- to 100-year-old infrastructure," Thomson said. "But we do believe they didn't aggressively work on these issues when they were running the authority for three and a half years."

Last year, PWSA customers filed a class-action lawsuit in the Allegheny County Court over water meter upgrades that resulted in inaccurate bills, increased administrative fees and improper shutoffs.

That lawsuit was put on hold in June pending settlement negotiations.

The state Department of Environmental Protection cited PWSA in December because, under Veolia's management in 2014, the authority switched the chemicals it used in the water treatment process to reduce corrosion of pipes and the possible release of lead. The DEP's operating permit barred PWSA from making such changes without notifying the state, and PWSA changed back to its previous chemical early this year.

"It is clear Veolia cared more about their bottom line than providing residents with the high-quality water and customer service they deserve," Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto said in a statement.

A binding arbitration hearing, with an arbitrator jointly selected by both parties or chosen by the arbitration association, will be held within four months of Wednesday's filing.

Matthew Santoni is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach him at 412-391-0927 or [msantoni@tribweb.com](mailto:msantoni@tribweb.com) (<mailto:msantoni@tribweb.com>).

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## Sewer line repairs leave residents, PWSA at odds

BOB BAUDER [✉](https://twitter.com/BobBauder) (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Monday, Oct. 24, 2016, 4:36 p.m.

Residents of Homehurst Avenue in Overbrook will have to wait several more months before learning whether they will be held responsible for expensive repairs to a sewer line servicing their homes.

A dozen homeowners there have battled the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority over ownership of the line since a 2014 backup sent raw sewage flowing onto the street. The Allegheny County Health Department cited the residents for violating department regulations and required them to replace the line or agree to share future maintenance costs.

Original estimates for replacement ranged from \$500,000 to \$1 million. PWSA since has said residents could repair only a bad section of the line for about \$5,300.

Residents on Monday who attended a health department hearing said replacement costs would exceed the value of their homes, which were built in the 1920s. They said a future maintenance agreement would scare off potential home buyers.

"(PWSA) is doing this obviously just to suit themselves," said Natalie Leon, one of the residents. "We'll see what happens."

Residents argued that PWSA always has maintained the sewer line and noted a manhole on the street has a cover indicating it is owned by the city. Rick Obermeier, PWSA's deputy director of engineering and construction, said authority records indicate it is a private line and homeowners have shared responsibility for its maintenance.

PWSA maintains 1,250 miles of public sewer lines. Private owners maintain another 750 miles, including lines running from homes to a sewer main.

Max Slater, the health department hearing officer, said he would issue a ruling in several months. He gave both sides two weeks to prepare summaries of their arguments.

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## Recently discovered documents could settle Pittsburgh residents' dispute over sewer line

BOB BAUDER 🐦 (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Thursday, Nov. 10, 2016, 10:09 a.m.

Public records dating to 1929 could decide a long-standing disagreement between a dozen Overbrook residents and the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority over a sewer line the authority contends should be maintained by residents.

City Councilwoman Natalia Rudiak of Carrick dug up documents from Baldwin Township and the city that she said proves the sewer line on Homehurst Avenue is a public line. She said PWSA, not Overbrook residents, should be responsible for expensive repairs and maintenance.

The dispute hinges on a ruling by the Allegheny County Health Department, which heard testimony during an October hearing. Hearing Officer Max Slater plans to issue a ruling in about four weeks, according to department spokeswoman Melissa Wade.

Rudiak said ordinances approved by Pittsburgh and Baldwin more than 80 years ago should decide the case. Her office submitted them last week for Slater's review.

Baldwin officials in 1929 approved an ordinance creating "Sanitary Sewer District Number Eight" that included Homehurst Avenue, then known as Home Avenue. The ordinance provided by Rudiak's office calls for the construction of public sewers on the street and surrounding neighborhood.

Pittsburgh on July 1, 1930, annexed that portion of Baldwin, including a four-block section of Homehurst that contains the disputed sewer line.

"I believe that when that portion of Baldwin Township was annexed, the sewer line was public," Rudiak said. "When the city of Pittsburgh annexed that portion of Baldwin Township, it also annexed that sewer line as well."

Pittsburgh in 1999 created PWSA and turned over sewer lines previously maintained by its Department of Public Works to the authority.

PWSA spokesman Will Pickering declined comment.

Former authority spokesman Brendan Schubert said PWSA in 1999 assumed responsibility only for public sewers recorded on drawings provided by the city. The authority, he said, had no records for the Homehurst line.

Problems on Homehurst began in 2014 when a sewer line backup sent raw sewage into the street. PWSA unclogged the line, but the health department cited residents for violating department regulations and required them to replace the line or agree to share future maintenance costs.

PWSA originally estimated that line replacement could cost \$500,000 to \$1 million but since has said residents could replace only a bad section for about \$5,300.

Residents fear repair and maintenance costs could exceed the value of their homes built in the 1920s.

Natalie Leon, 70, who has lived on Homehurst for 25 years, said PWSA always has maintained the line. She noted that a manhole cover indicates it is owned by the city.

"The city took over all of these sewer lines, and PWSA is responsible for everything that the city was originally responsible for," Leon said.

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## PWSA water rates to increase in 2017 and 2018

BOB BAUDER 🐦 (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Friday, Dec. 2, 2016, 2:21 p.m.



*Philip G. Pavely | Tribune-Review*

PWSA crews make emergency repairs to an 8-inch water main on Mt. Royal Road in Squirrel Hill on March 2, 2016.

Monthly bills for Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority customers will increase in 2017 and 2018.

Citing aging infrastructure and massive debt, PWSA's board of directors on Friday unanimously approved a \$130 million 2017 operating budget and rate increases for each of the next two years. They also raised fees for new sewer and water connections.

Bills for average residential customers using about 4,000 gallons of water per month will increase by 13 percent in 2017 and 8 percent in 2018.

Kent Lindsay, the authority's financial officer, said it would amount to about \$6.90 per month extra next year and about \$4.80 more in 2018.

"The revenue is sorely needed by this organization," said Bernard Lindstrom, PWSA's interim executive director. "We've been neglecting the infrastructure here for many years."

Residents also will pay 11 percent more for sewage treatment in 2017 under a series of rate increase approved in 2013 by the Alcosan board of directors. PWSA collects sewage charges for Alcosan.

New sewer and water connections are increasing by a total of 420 percent. A residential sewer tap-in will cost \$2,978 next year and water tap-in will cost \$2,224. Each cost \$500 in 2016.

Board members said they were reluctant to raise rates, but noted the authority is plagued with failing water and sewer piping — with some critical main lines dating to before the Civil War — and \$750 million debt.

"About 100 years of neglect and lack of hard decision making left us in a position where we have to raise rates and raise our budget," said Paul Leger, a board member, who also serves as the Pittsburgh finance director. "I'm also a resident and a ratepayer, and I don't like it."

Lindstrom said the budget positions the authority to pay down debt principal and increase capital expenditures. He said he plans to ask the board for \$60 million in capital spending next year, up from about \$40 million this year. The board will vote on a capital budget in January.

"Where we're at right now is a fix as fail system," he said. "Basically when something fails, we fix it. What we need to do is fix those critical components before they fail."

Lindstrom listed two critical examples: PWSA's computer systems used for billing and a main waterline feeding the Highland Park reservoir, which supplies 60 percent of the city's water.

Lindstrom said the computer systems are 10 years out of date and "one billing cycle away from another crash." The authority was unable to issue bills in certain neighborhoods for months in recent years because of system failures.

He said one of four water mains feeding the Highland Park reservoir has been out of service for more than three months because of serious leaks. The pipe dates to before the Civil War.

The budget, up by about \$13 million over this year, dedicates \$14 million in rate revenue to capital improvements. PWSA intends to borrow an additional \$46 million from a revolving credit line at PNC Bank. Lindsay said the variable rate is currently 1.3 percent.

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# Audit criticizes county Health Department in wake of high lead levels in Pittsburgh water

December 19, 2016 1:06 PM

By Don Hopey / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

An audit has concluded that the Allegheny County Health Department isn't providing adequate oversight of 36 community water supplies and hasn't appropriately responded to tests showing high lead levels in some city drinking water samples.

But the health department replied that it's doing what the law allows and said the human health risk from lead in Pittsburgh's water pales in comparison to the risk from exposure to flaking and deteriorating lead paint.

County Controller Chelsa Wagner said her 34-page audit report, released Monday, found "concerning lapses" in the health department's monitoring of the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority, including a failure to identify a change in the use of water corrosion control chemicals, from soda ash to caustic soda, in April 2014.

She said high lead levels found in the water supply in Flint, Mich., in 2014 had heightened the public's concern about lead in public water supplies, but the health department hasn't reflected those concerns or taken action appropriate to a "water quality crisis."

"This is a question of priorities and will, and perhaps casting an eye on agencies that have traditionally not come under much scrutiny," Ms. Wagner said. "This is too big a question and concern to continue to be left to localities that lack the wherewithal to truly confront this issue or unaccountable authorities that are content to point fingers elsewhere."

The audit says the state Department of Environmental Protection granted the county health department primary oversight of the 36 community water systems operating in the county, but the scope of the health department's authority is unclear. The report urged the health department to formalize that arrangement and step up its monitoring, enforcement and water test verification efforts, as authorized by the federal Clean Water Act.

The health department director, Karen Hacker said her department follows procedures in the federal Lead and Copper Rule and has publicized the high lead levels in the PWSA service area through public education, outreach sessions and on the department's website. It has also petitioned the U. S.

Environmental Protection Agency to require more frequent water testing and tighter health-based lead action levels and advised concerned customers to have their water tested for free by the PWSA.

But Dr. Hacker said lead in paint and airborne lead due to home remodeling work pose much greater risks to children than lead in water.

"Over the last two years, I can say that we've never had a situation in the county where lead in the water was a primary contributor to high childhood lead readings," Dr. Hacker said. "Lead in paint is a much more substantial risk."

She said that of the almost 14,000 children in the county tested for lead in 2014, 135 had elevated lead levels in their blood. None of those elevated levels could be linked to exposure to water. Rather, she said, all were related to airborne dust from old and deteriorating lead paint. The health department has proposed requiring childhood lead level testing and reporting.

The PWSA has about 83,000 customer households. It's estimated that 5 percent to 20 percent have lead service lines, the lines running from the water main connectors into individual houses.

In April, the DEP ordered PWSA to test lead levels in 100 homes with lead pipes, and lead levels above the action level of 15 parts per billion were found in 17. As a result, the PWSA was required to inventory the lead service lines and begin a replacement program. Ms. Wagner said the authority's inability to identify the number and location of those lines reflects a failure to prioritize public concerns.

"We need an all-hands-on-deck effort to address all areas of concern," she said. "Where those [lead] pipes are is certainly one of them."

Exposure to high lead levels is hazardous to pregnant women, infants and young children. Studies show even low-level childhood exposure can diminish mental capacity, and higher exposures can cause behavioral problems, learning disabilities, seizures and death.


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## Health Department sides with Pittsburgh residents in fight with PWSA

BOB BAUDER  (<https://twitter.com/BobBauder>) | Wednesday, Dec. 28, 2016, 4:09 p.m.



*Guy Wathen / Tribune-Review*

Homehurst Avenue in Overbrook on Saturday, April 9, 2016.

Three days before Christmas, longtime Overbrook resident Natalie Leon said she received "a gift from God."

Leon and 11 other homeowners on Homehurst Avenue have battled the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority for nearly three years over a sewer line under their street that the authority said was their responsibility to maintain and repair. Residents claimed the opposite.

The Allegheny County Health Department last week ruled in favor of the residents.

"I find that the sewer line underneath Homehurst Avenue is a public line and that the city of Pittsburgh is responsible for the sewer line's maintenance and repairs," Max Slater, the department's administrative hearing officer, wrote in a Dec. 22 decision.

Residents were elated over the news. PWSA declined to comment.

"My neighbors and I are so grateful because this would have really devalued our homes," said Leon, 70, who led the fight. "It really came at a beautiful time, before Christmas."

The dispute started in early 2014 when the sewer line backed up. PWSA cleaned it out but notified residents that it was private and they would be liable for future problems.

PWSA, which assumed control of city sewers in 1999, said it had no record of the Homehurst line.

Health officials stepped in when it clogged again in October 2014 and cited residents with violating department regulations because raw sewage was flowing on the street.

Officials gave residents a choice: Replace the line or agree to share future maintenance costs. Replacement costs were estimated to be as high as \$1 million.

"My main concern was the value of my property," said Patti Schanck, 56, a Homehurst resident of more than 30 years. "Who would want to buy my home if they knew they were responsible for this sewer line and its maintenance and the costs associated with that? I thought it would make my property basically worthless."

Residents appealed the citation, and Slater determined after a hearing in October that evidence presented by PWSA was "unpersuasive."

City Councilwoman Natalia Rudiak of Carrick, whose office argued on behalf of residents, said she was frustrated by PWSA's response.

"It should have never gotten this far," she said. "The PWSA is an authority and needs to act in the public interest. It didn't act in the public interest in this case."

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