

How State Agencies Can Support LSL Replacement

Case Example from Washington State Department of Health's Office of Drinking Water

In May 2016, Washington's Governor issued a [directive](#) to state agencies to address lead in drinking water, including directives to work with water systems to identify all lead service lines (LSL) and lead service connections (LSC) within two years. It also included a directive to develop policy and budgetary proposals to remove all LSLs and lead components in Washington's water systems within 15 years. Washington State Department of Health's (DOH) Office of Drinking Water responded to these directives by fielding a survey to nearly all of the state's 4,100 water systems to develop a statewide inventory of LSLs and LSCs. DOH then followed up with water systems to refine their survey data and, for systems with LSLs and LSCs, support development of an action plan for replacement. In Washington's case, this inventory initiative revealed a relatively low LSL and LSC burden of less than <10,000 statewide. DOH continues to provide technical assistance to water systems as they identify and replace their LSLs and LSCs, with the goal of removing all by 2031. Washington released a [full report](#) on this survey process and findings in 2016 and an [update](#) in 2018. DOH staff involved in this effort shared the following learnings, which may be transferable to other states:

- Administrative action like the Governor's Directive is extremely valuable. It helps state agencies prioritize this issue and gives them leeway to go about addressing it. It gives the agency a clear reason to reach out to water systems and offer support. Directing state agencies to take action also helps set a collaborative tone. It signals "we [the state primacy agency and purveyors] have a shared obligation in addressing this issue" said former DOH staff member Scott Torpie.
- LSL inventorying and removal initiatives can be effectively undertaken without state authority to compel action. Washington found that, in fact, many utilities were already more proactive in this area than the state knew, and the state's survey helped align, compile, and accelerate ongoing efforts.
- Follow up is key, both during surveying and after. Using follow up phone interviews to clarify survey responses, Washington DOH was able to get much more accurate and complete inventory data. Then, when shifting to action plans, DOH staff continued to provide reliable technical assistance and reminders of funding deadlines, and to share learnings from other systems. "Just knowing we [DOH] were going to call them back in six months and keep track of progress—say this is where you were then, where are you now—helped water systems see we were dedicated to seeing this through," said Torpie.
- The survey process helped the state improve its Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) to direct funding for this problem. Initially, projects were only eligible for DWSRF funds if at least 50.1 percent of the total service line replacement costs were associated with LSL replacement. They found this requirement created high financial risk for water systems, which dissuaded them from accessing the program. Hearing this feedback, Washington modified its DWSRF so that all work performed within 500 feet of a replaced LSL or LSC is eligible for reimbursement.
- Give praise where it is due. Washington made a point to acknowledge and draw media attention to communities that were proactive in addressing lead in their water systems. "Some water systems completed replacement way ahead of our timeline," said Torpie, "that is a big deal and we want people to know it."