

Report: Lead in water a serious problem

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Dozens of the nation's largest drinking water utilities have tried to hide lead contamination and failed to correct problems, according to a report published yesterday.

An examination of 65 of the 3,000 largest utilities found cities such as Philadelphia, Boston, New York City, Providence, R.I., and Portland, Ore., are "manipulating the results of tests used to detect lead in water, violating federal law and putting millions of Americans at risk," The Wash-

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ington Post said.

The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority contested the findings, issuing a news release accusing the Post of providing "no evidence of the allegations."

The newspaper said state and federal regulators helped utilities avoid expensive ways of reducing lead in drinking water.

Pregnant women and infants are the most vulnerable to lead, which can cause kidney and brain damage and, in some cases, death.

The Environmental Protection Agency has required drinking water utilities since 1991 to reduce contamination if lead concentrations exceed 15 parts per

billion in more than 10 percent of taps sampled.

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority executive director, Frederick A. Laskey, said his agency "has fully complied with the federal testing regulations under the close scrutiny of state and federal regulators."

While lead can leach out of

home plumbing, Laskey said his agency has adopted "a very successful program of corrosion control adjustments to water chemistry to greatly reduce corrosion of home plumbing."

About 54,000 community water systems supply water to about 90 percent of the U.S. population, according to American Water Works Association.

The Post said its analysis of EPA data identified 274 water systems, serving 11.5 million people, that had reported unsafe lead levels since 2000.