

Lead in plumbing products

A review of lead in plumbing products was initiated by the ABCB following high-profile instances of lead leaching into drinking water.

The review commenced in 2018 with the ABCB commissioning Macquarie University to undertake a literature review to determine the extent to which plumbing products and materials contribute to drinking water lead levels in excess of those permitted by the National Construction Code (NCC), Volume Three. This research concluded that copper alloy plumbing products are the most likely source of lead in drinking water (as measured at point of discharge). Subsequently, it was recommended that the ABCB consider reducing the permissible lead levels in copper alloy plumbing products that come into contact with drinking water.

In May 2019, a Lead in Plumbing Products Forum was convened by the ABCB with representatives of plumbing manufacturers, chairpersons of Standards Australia's technical committees responsible for the relevant product standards, plumbing suppliers/retailers and the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth), who are responsible for providing health policy advice.. During the forum, participants considered the need to further reduce lead levels in plumbing products and 92% of participants agreed that lead content of plumbing products in contact with drinking water should be reduced.

In December 2020 the ABCB released a Consultation Regulation Impact Statement (RIS), which assessed whether the permissible lead content in copper alloy plumbing products should be reduced, taking into account quantitative and qualitative economic considerations. Following this consultation, a Decision RIS was developed by the ABCB.

The Decision RIS was considered by the ABCB Board at its meeting in June, where it was agreed that, subject to consideration of submissions received in response to the NCC public comment draft:

- the lead content of plumbing products in contact with drinking water be limited to 0.25% and reflected in amendments to the 2022 version of the National Construction Code (NCC 2022).
- A three-year transition period being implemented for the recertification of copper alloy plumbing products in contact with drinking water through the WaterMark Certification Scheme. This would commence upon the adoption of NCC 2022 on the 1 September 2022.
- An implementation plan being developed in consultation with impacted stakeholders outlining key milestones and review points for point-of-installation enforcement.
- Prioritisation of consequential amendments to applicable plumbing product specifications and the WaterMark Certification Scheme to achieve compatibility with the changes to the NCC.

In addition:

- Further consideration of threshold values for lead substitutes will occur in consultation with health authorities.
- Develop a project proposal to amend AS/NZS 4020 Testing of products in contact with drinking water, to be more reflective of conditions within Australia and the range of variables impacting drinking water quality.

For more information:

Tom Roberts, Director – NCC Management and Standards

Tom.Roberts@abcb.gov.au

Neil Savery, Chief Executive Officer

Neil.Savery@abcb.gov.au

ends