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Croton continues questioning of chemical

Story and photo by Adriane Tillman

Less than a dozen Croton residents turned out for a special meeting on Wednesday, November 7, to discuss the village's plan to add zinc orthophosphate to its drinking water to reduce corroding pipes that leach lead and copper into the water.

Adding zinc orthophosphate into the water will cost the village \$30,000 annually. Consultant Chazen Engineering, a firm hired by the village, recommended using the chemical to slow the corroding pipes and reduce levels of lead and copper in the water. The chemical is commonly used throughout the country and works over a wide range of systems, said Michael Fanning, a Professional Engineer for Chazen.

"The reduction of lead concentration in the water is a public health benefit, and the chemical prolongs the life of the water supply system," Fanning said.

Residents' complaints about brown water and the engineering department brought the issue to the attention of the village board, which hired Chazen in September 2005 to propose a corrosion control method.

Professional Engineer Rocco Mastronardi, who implemented New York City's corrosion control program 15 years ago, and has worked for the Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Water Supply for the past 17 years attended the meeting. He said the zinc orthophosphate treatment is considered a "slam dunk" among industry experts to control lead and copper corrosion, short of replacing all the pipes.

Replacing all the pipes in the village would cost tens of millions of dollars and village officials say the village couldn't afford such a measure. Residents would also have to replace the pipes that run into their homes, according to Schmidt.

The village is seeking federal Community Development Block Grants to replace pipes on streets where the pipes dead end and the water stagnates, causing brown water, such as occurs on Nordica Drive, High Street and Piney Point.

Michael Mamone of Young Avenue believes the water is pure. Holding up a bottle of tap water before the trustees, he said the village should not add anything to it.

Carolyn Whittle attended the meeting to show the board effects of brown water at her home on Nordica Drive. She held up a water filter that had turned brown within a week from rust eroding



Carolyn Whittle holds up a cylinder filter that turned brown after one week of use at her Nordica Drive home, and a towel stained with rust from brown water.

Engagement

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into the water, and spoke of throwing away hundreds of dollars worth of sheets stained brown by the rust-tainted water. Whittle since spent \$3,000 on a water treatment to provide her clean water.

Community activist Bob Wintermeier said that he believes zinc orthophosphate poses no health risk, after speaking to the Westchester County Health Department, the Maui District Health Office (that experienced problems after adding the chemical) and a University of Virginia water expert about its effects.

The Department of Public Works suggests those homes run their water for at least a minute to wash away high concentrations of lead, and advises homes to purchase kits to test their water for lead.

Trustee Charles Kane suggested homeowners purchase lead filters for their faucets, which can be purchased for \$19.99 from the local hardware store.

Frequently asked questions about zinc phosphate

The following information was contributed to NCN by Marc Edwards, a Virginia Tech civil-engineering professor and water-corrosion expert, after correspondence with community activist Bob Wintermeier.

Why would a water utility add zinc phosphate to drinking water?

About half of all water companies in the U.S. safely add phosphate to their drinking water to help stop corrosion. Of the different types of phosphate that are used, zinc phosphate is the most common.

Is zinc phosphate safe?

Zinc and phosphate are both required in the diet of healthy children and adults. A typical adult consumes more than 1000 mg of phosphate every day and it is recommended that people consume at least 3 to 14 mg zinc every day dependent on body weight. The amount of zinc phosphate that will be added to the water and consumed, will represent only 0.5 to 10% of the typical daily intake of these constituents.

What types of foods/beverages contain phosphates?

Phosphates are Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved and are already added to many of your favorite foods and drinks. Phosphates are listed as completely safe by the FDA and Center for Science in the Public Interest. Phosphates are present in cheese, cake, cookies, breads, crackers, powdered foods, cereal, butter, chocolate and soft drinks. Some types of soda have more than 500 times the level of phosphates added to drinking water.

Are there potential drawbacks to using zinc phosphates?

There are a few possible short-term drawbacks associated with use of zinc phosphates. First, as the zinc phosphate works to build up a new protective scale (e.g., rust) layer on pipe, for a month or so some of the old scale that covers the pipe can detach and cause discolored or "red water." If red water is observed consumers should flush the line until the water runs clear before collecting water to drink. If flushing the lines for one minute or two does not produce clear water, consumers should call the water company so that they can track the frequency of the problem, and consider dispatching a team to flush the large pipes near the homes clean. Likewise, in a few prior cases where zinc phosphates successfully reduced pinhole leak frequency in copper pipe, the number of leaks increased somewhat for a month or so while the inhibitor started to work, before they rapidly decreased to low levels.

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