

Elkhorn Water Utility – Answers to FAQs

1. Is Elkhorn’s water safe to drink?

Yes, the City of Elkhorn’s water is safe to drink because it is regularly tested by City staff. If a test result indicates a level of contaminant higher than DNR limits, the City immediately takes corrective action and shuts down the well and/or water treatment plant where the contaminant has been detected. Elkhorn publishes a consumer confidence report every year that shows test results for potential contaminants, which is distributed to residents and the DNR by July 1 each year. A copy of the consumer confidence report is available on the City’s website at <https://www.cityofelkhorn.org/utilities/page/water-service>.

For more detailed information, all of the City’s testing results are available through the DNR at <https://apps.dnr.wi.gov/dwsportalpub/DS/View/138385>.

2. Why did Elkhorn request to raise water rates in 2024?

The City applied to the Public Service Commission during the summer of 2023 to review the City’s water rates. The City’s water rates had not been increased since 2017. Due to increasing operational and maintenance costs and water system needs, the City’s water expenses were exceeding revenues.*

*Note: The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that inflation has increased by 24.3% from 2017 through the end of 2023.

3. I’ve heard there were DNR violations in the past? Is this true?

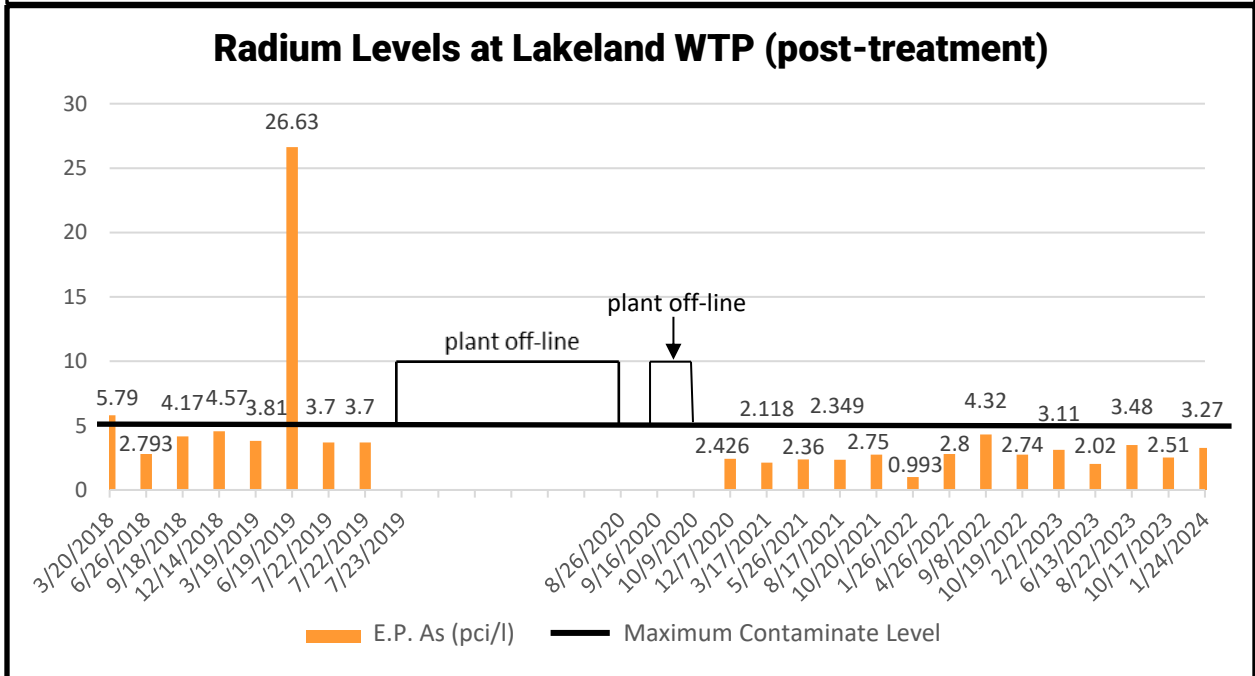
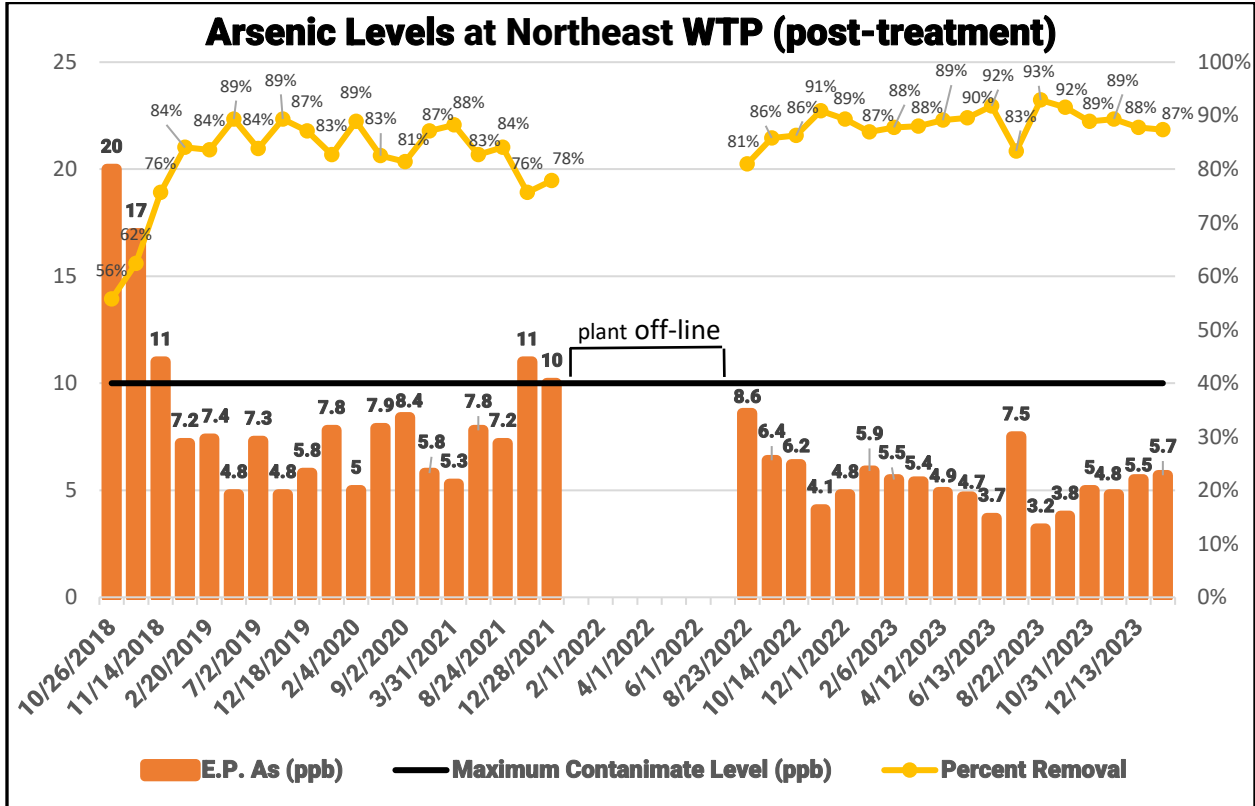
Yes, since 2018 the City’s water utility has had several DNR violations. The City had an arsenic violation in 2018 and a radium violation in 2019. The City also had a lead violation in 2021 for failing to replace 7% of utility-side lead services. The City notified water customers of each of these violations by including an insert in the monthly bill and publishing a notice in the *Elkhorn Independent* newspaper.

4. What caused the radium and arsenic violations?

The City’s water supply comes from a deep aquifer that requires three custom-designed treatment plants to treat the challenging groundwater found in this part of the state. The treatment plants have complex piping, valving, chemical feed systems, aerators, reservoirs, filters, ion exchange softeners, pumps, control/computer systems, etc. If any one of these systems has an issue, it can cause an isolated incident resulting in the treatment system being temporarily down or causing it to operate less efficiently. The radium and arsenic

violations that occurred were the result of an incident where some part of the treatment plant had a mechanical issue or a system was operating improperly. Once the violations were identified, they were resolved as quickly as possible.

The following chart was distributed to water customers as part of a letter in July 2023. The chart shows the history of arsenic violations in the water at the Northeast WTP. The chart has been updated with the most current test results. The second chart shows the history of radium violations at the Lakeland WTP and the most current test results.



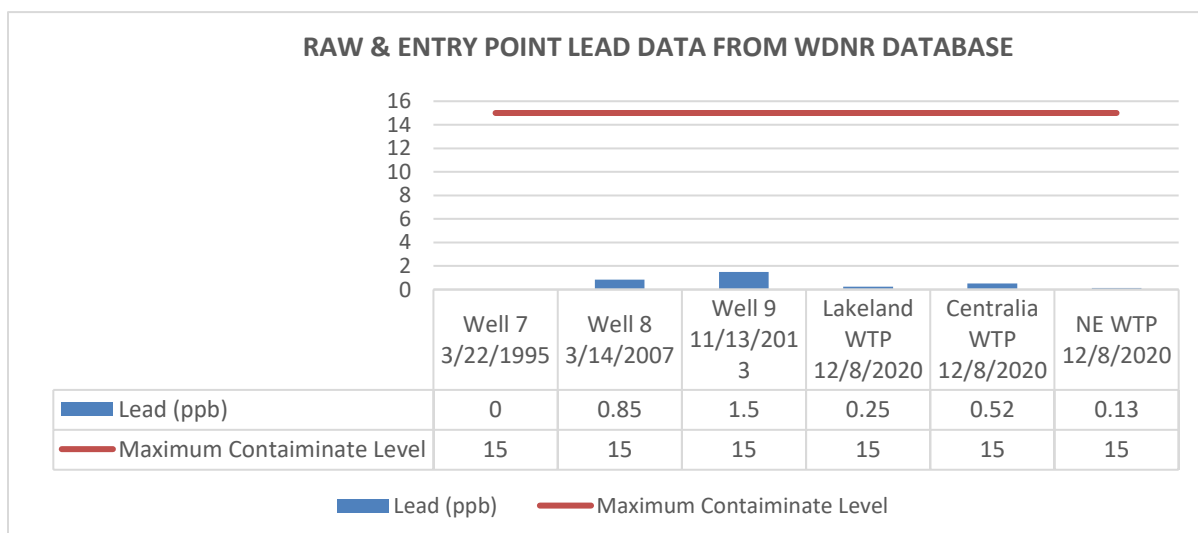
5. Do I have lead in my water?

The City of Elkhorn’s water system has some utility-side lead services and private-side lead services. The City is actively replacing its utility-side lead service lines and working with private property owners to replace their lead services. Whether or not your property is served by lead lines is going to depend on your specific address. Generally speaking, homes that have a lead service are at the greatest risk of having lead in their water. In the Elkhorn area, it has been found that homes built around or before 1930 are at a higher risk of having a lead service. Residents with older plumbing materials such as lead, galvanized piping, and solder before 1979 also have a higher risk.

The City is actively working to identify those lines, and the City plans to have a service material inventory available to the public (and DNR/EPA) by the end of October 2024. This inventory will show areas where private and utility-side lead services are known or unknown throughout the City. As funding is available, the City plans to actively replace lead services over time. **If you would like to schedule a cross-connection inspection to determine whether your private service line contains lead, please contact 723-3138 or dgall@cityofelkhorn.org.** You may also receive a call from the City to schedule an inspection as the City is proactively creating the service material inventory.

Note: The City adds a chemical called orthophosphate to the treated water to help prevent lead from leaching out of a lead service line or lead solder within a home or building. This chemical is approved and recommended by DNR and EPA for communities that have known lead services. Following some higher lead sample results (that triggered the violation), the City increased the chemical addition to help provide more protection. Retesting of multiple sites will occur in the future to verify the success of the increased chemical. If a customer has a known lead service lateral, it is good practice to run their water for several minutes each morning to flush the service lateral with clean system water. See WDNR recommendations at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/DrinkingWater/lead.html>

6. How much lead is found in the City’s raw source water?



7. What water tower or water treatment plant does the water come from that feeds my house or property?

No particular water tower or water treatment plant serves individual addresses. Water from all three treatment plants enters a large, interconnected piping network under the streets. Within that piping network, the water combines and mixes. The water towers are also connected to the same piping network and are filled with the combined/mixed water. Generally, if an address is closer to one of the water treatment plants or towers, that address would receive a higher percentage of water from those locations, but the percentage depends on the different water system demands and what water treatment plants are running on that particular day.

8. Why is there chlorine in my water?

Chlorine is added to the raw water from the wells for disinfection purposes as required by DNR and EPA. Chlorine is also utilized at the water treatment plants as part of the treatment process to remove contaminants prior to the water leaving the plant. The City monitors chlorine levels at the water treatment plants, and throughout the piping system, on a weekly basis. The City is also required to take bacteria samples regularly at the wells, and throughout the piping system, to ensure the water is safe. All historical bacterial test results can be found here at <https://apps.dnr.wi.gov/dwsportalpub/DS/View/138385>.

9. What is a running annual average as it pertains to water quality sampling and results?

The “running annual average” is defined by the Wisconsin Legislature in NR 809.04(71). It is defined as “the sum of 1, 2, 3, or 4 calendar quarter sample results divided by 4. The first sample may be the average of the initial and confirmation sample results. If more than 4 calendar quarters of samples have been collected in more than 4 consecutive calendar quarters, the results from the 4 most recent quarters are used. If multiple compliance samples are collected in a single calendar quarter, the sample which yielded the highest concentration is used to calculate the running annual average. If a quarterly sample is not taken within a required consecutive quarter, then the divisor is the number of quarterly samples that have been analyzed within the required time period.”

10. What is the City doing to improve the quality and reliability of its water supply?

Elkhorn’s oldest water treatment plant, Centralia, is planned to reduce production soon due to age and rehab costs. In addition, the City is growing, requiring more drinking water and fire protection capabilities. To meet these demands, the City will be working on projects at the Northeast WTP and Lakeland WTP in the next two years.

a) Installation of gravity sewer line at the Northeast Water Treatment Plant in 2024

The current factor limiting the NE WTP’s water production is how much wastewater can leave the plant. Wastewater comes from backwashing, regenerating, and maintaining the

sophisticated treatment equipment and filters. To release more wastewater from the plant, the City must abandon the original, small sewer forcemain and install a new, larger gravity sewer. The proposed sanitary sewer main is sized to allow the NE WTP to operate at a higher capacity now, and to account for its future capacity. The new sewer main is also large enough to provide additional capacity to serve future development near the plant. The new pipeline will be a great asset for the City's future.

b) Rehab of Lakeland Water Treatment Plant in 2025

The current factors limiting the Lakeland WTP water production are the amount of radium it can remove and the need for more chlorine at this higher flow rate. Furthermore, since the plant is almost 30 years old, building improvements and the replacement of obsolete equipment are important. These upgrades will get the building up to current standards, along with nearly doubling the treated water it can produce. With these improvements the Lakeland WTP will be a great asset for the City's future.