Michigan will require lead service lines to be replaced starting in 2021

As part of what state officials say is the strictest set of lead and copper standards in the nation, Michigan will require all of the state’s public water systems to replace their lead service lines. Starting in 2021, the Detroit Free Press reports, each public water system must replace, on average, 5 percent of its lead service pipes per year over a 20-year period, with water customers paying for most of the estimated $2.5 billion price tag.

The new state-level rules also create stricter “lead action levels,” the point at which a water system must take steps to control corrosion. The federal lead action level is 15 parts per billion; Michigan’s will be 12 ppb starting in 2025. In addition, the state will establish a new water system advisory council and mandate that two water samples be collected at sites served by lead service lines.

“The federal Lead and Copper Rule simply does not do enough to protect public health,” Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder said in June when announcing the new standards. The changes come four years after the start of a public health crisis in the Michigan town of Flint — the result of residents’ drinking water being contaminated with lead due to a switch in the town’s water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River.