

WaterSafe urges plumbers to use only lead-free solder to protect UK drinking water

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WaterSafe, the UK's free online search facility supported by the water industry to help customers find competent and qualified plumbers, is issuing a strong call to all plumbing professionals: make the switch to lead-free solder exclusively. This urgent appeal follows concerns raised in a recent WaterSafe podcast highlighting the hidden dangers of lead solder in drinking water systems, despite it being banned for such use since the 1970s.

The podcast featured Julie Spinks, WaterSafe Director, and Ruben Duggan, a WorldSkills silver medallist plumber. They discussed how, despite regulations, lead solder remains a risk due to its continued presence in plumbers' toolkits for non-drinking water applications, leading to potential accidental misuse.

"Lead solder has been banned for use on drinking water systems for decades due to its harmful effects, particularly on babies and young children, where it can impact development and IQ," explained Julie Spinks. "Our research shows that two-thirds of plumbers carry lead solder in addition to lead-free. While it's legal for non-drinking water use, we're deeply concerned about accidental cross-contamination."

Even a small mistake can have significant consequences. Spinks shared an concerning case study where a school's refurbished kitchen, was fitted with lead-soldered joints, which contributed to lead levels measured at the kitchen tap, up to 18 times the UK legal standard.

Ruben Duggan echoed these concerns from a plumber's perspective. "During my college years, we always used lead-free solder, but nobody really emphasised the dangers of accidentally using leaded solder," he

said. "It's a two-minute mistake in picking up the wrong solder, and that joint can affect the drinking water system forever."

WaterSafe is championing the exclusive use of lead-free solder to eradicate this preventable problem and ensure the continued safety of the UK's drinking water, which is already among the best in the world. By only carrying and using lead-free solder, plumbers can eliminate the risk of accidental contamination and protect public health.

Listen to the podcast: <https://bit.ly/lead-free-solder-podcast>

More information: <https://www.watersafe.org.uk/advice/is-your-plumber-lead-free/>