WATER

The DEP’s primary method of enforcement is to issue fines but most water systems are facing financial struggles. If they can’t afford to invest in infrastructure and routine maintenance, they probably can’t afford to pay the fines, either.

“If you can explain to me how the fines do anything but make this mess difficult, I’d appreciate it,” said Robert Wozniak, interim executive director of the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority. The Pittsburgh authority was slapped with a $1.8 million fine last month for “unintentional failure to report violations.” Of that, $1.6 million will be used to help low-income residents replace lead water lines.

That figure, in addition to the more than $500 million worth of upgrades the PAWSA needs to make in the next decade, will have to be shouldered by ratepayers. That’s a problem because some 31 percent of city residents were below the poverty line in 2016.

Daniels said penalties are a deterrent to the agency now, especially and only in situations where it’s needed to spur change.

In Pittsburgh’s case, another factor was the 2016 decision to switch from steel to copper pipe, which is far more costly but makes it harder for lead to leach into drinking water.

“I worked in government most of my career and I know there’s inefficiency cut there at some point, but it’s not something you can cut without impacting services,” Daniels said.

Pennsylvania’s water woes are hardly a new problem.

The EPA’s 2016 drinking water warning may have surprised the public but it didn’t surprise anyone at the DEP. It followed similar warnings from the EPA and the Office of Surface Mining about air quality and mining regulations.

In the past decade, the agency has given increasing attention to the issue but it’s still struggling to grapple with the issue of lead, which continues to be a problem, and the issue of whether to fix it.

Daniels and other experts agree that there are two ways to find out if you have a lead service line and test it. The first is to ask your utility if they have any record of the lead service line. The second is to get a test kit and test it yourself.

Daniels and others agree that residents need to take action if they suspect they have lead in their water system.

One of the best ways to do this is to get tested yourself by using a kit from the EPA or the Environmental Protection Agency. These tests are inexpensive and easy to use.

In addition to the EPA’s drinking water testing, there are a number of other options. You can also get help from your utility or from your state or local health department.

The key is to get tested and know what you have.

“Knowledge is power. We notice when the trash isn’t picked up and we notice when the water is brown,” Daniels said.

The EPA has issued a series of guidelines for water systems to help them reduce the amount of lead in their systems. These guidelines include:

- Improving water quality by adding chemicals to prevent lead from sloughing off:
- Using industrial waste ash to caustic soda as an anti-corrosive:
- Creating accountability for drinking water in the first instance.

The recently enacted budget includes a $5.6 million increase for the DEP. It also includes a $100 million increase for the Office of Surface Mining and a $100 million increase for the Office of Environmental Quality Review, which reviews proposed regulations.

In 2010 only to be pulled back the following year under then-Gov. Tom Corbett’s administration.

Gov. Tom Wolf’s administration initially planned its hopes on a $7.5 million fee package, which is still working its way through the regulatory process, that the DEP preferred last year. The prevailing wisdom in Harrisburg is that any substantial increase to the DEP budget would be a tough sell with the Republican majority in Harrisburg. Since 2013, the agency has been a gradual increase in state funding, although those increases have been slow and minor.

There are a number of exceptions to the canard budget includes a $5.6 million increase for the DEP. That would help pay for the hiring of 170 positions in 13 positions, which include compliance specialists, engineers and geologists.

Daniels and those trainees would eventually pay the DEP closer to a more optimal workload of 200-350 water systems per inspector. The figure would still be well below the national average of 4.

“It’s not going to get better immediately because we need to get these folks trained,” she said. “But once we get them in place, we’ll be closer to where we need to get to.”

Amodal drinking federal and state funding, the DEP for reminding me to fund the bill. It hasn’t had much of a change.

First, it comes down to policy choices the Legislature and the governor are constantly having conversations about,” McDermott said.

Here, the former environmental secretary, said he worries that Pennsylvania is on a path to the kinds of major outbreaks of waterborne illness that spurned promotions for drinking water in the first place.

One of the inspectors put it this way: “I like my job. I’m not a disgruntled employee. This is important, which is the only reason I came forward.”

It was only recently, in 2011, that the state Supreme Court ruled Pennsylvania’s right to water for all, pure water, and pure environment were constitutional. This means that the state now has an environmental, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment to strike down any parts of Act 13, the 2012 law that governs the Marcellus Shale gas industry.

Otherwise, state lawmakers and lawmakers targeted ignored the amendment passed in 1971.

“The constitution is only as good as the people who believe in it and act on it,” Kury said. “How do you protect clean water? It has to be enforced politically as well as judicially and the political part is easier. They all take the oath. You’ve just got to push them.”