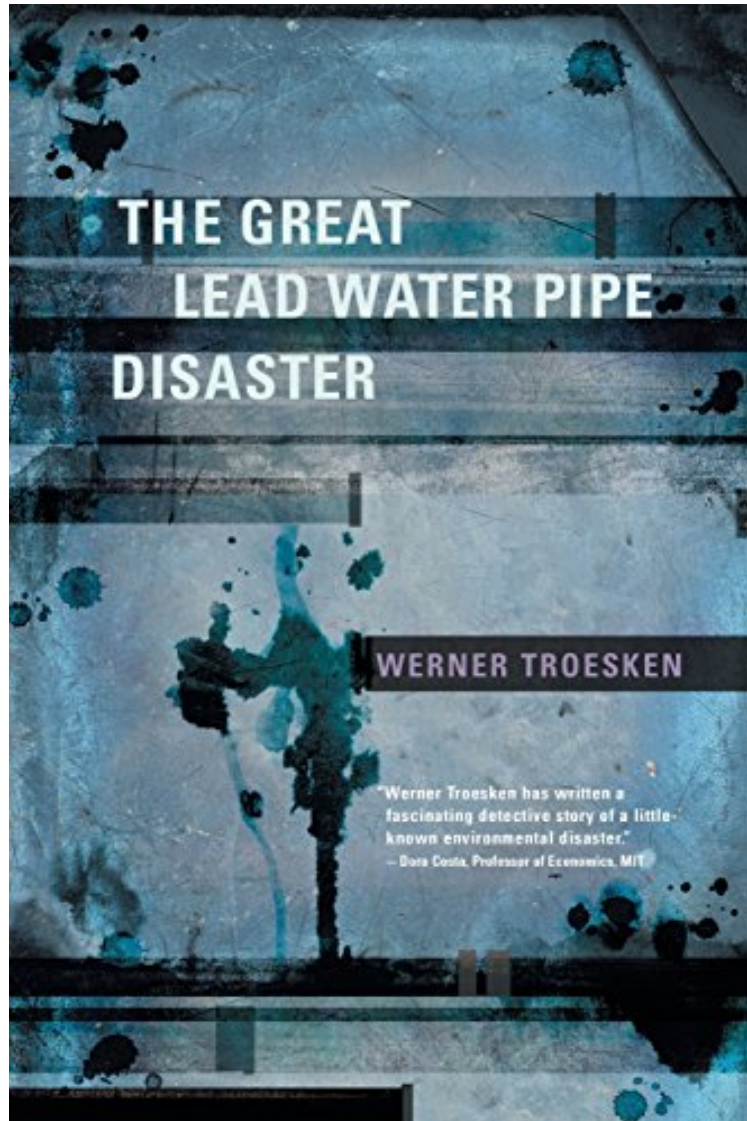


(Free pdf) The Great Lead Water Pipe Disaster (MIT Press)

## The Great Lead Water Pipe Disaster (MIT Press)

*Werner Troesken*

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**Werner Troesken : The Great Lead Water Pipe Disaster (MIT Press)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Great Lead Water Pipe Disaster (MIT Press):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. history, science, policy--what more could you want?By Veteran Reds FanTroesken smoothly integrates several complex topics in a very readable style. If you wondered how lead is so toxic, as well as the surprising level of exposure to it in the past, wonder no more. He carefully establishes how common it was to be exposed to levels of lead in drinking water that were dozens of times higher than the present day

EPA maximum. He establishes that public officials were loathe to do anything about it, in large part due to lead's excellent capabilities--it's malleable, strong, and cheap. And ever so toxic. Troesken concludes with a recommendation for further study on an overlooked topic--effects on human health of nonorganic toxins in the past. One more reason I'm glad to be alive now.5 of 14 people found the following review helpful. A little lead won't hurt ya! Look at meBy A\_2007\_readerRomans had lead in their pipes--you wanna blame the rise and fall of the Roman Empire on lead pipes? Lead is just a nuisance, nothing more. Heck, I used to eat lead paint as a kid and I don't have any long term side effects that I'm aware of. More seriously, the book has an irritating flaw: it keeps comparing old standards of care with modern standards of care in diagnosing lead, and then becomes an apologist for why the old standards were not that bad. Case in point: throughout the book the author points out that in the past people warned about lead in water, but since the mechanism on how lead hurts people was not fully understood (and still isn't, as the author says), these people could be ignored. That's like saying since the exact mechanism for smoking causing cancer is not yet fully understood, at the molecular level, then past attempts to say smoking is harmful are flawed and can be ignored. This point by the author is emphasized throughout and is irritating. Other than that, a decent book, but since the literature on lead is so extensive, I don't really see this book adding anything of value already not known. It also tries too hard to be 'scientific' by discussing a regression analysis, as if that's something radical. Further, the author spends little time on the 'real reason' (IMO) why lead mitigation is ignored: it's not too little scientific data, but rather the huge costs in upgrading municipal water supplies. The same argument is being made even today, not just for lead, as the author points out for Washington, DC, but for other drugs and chemicals found in water.3 stars max.3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Excellent historical expose about the negative impacts of lead contaminationBy Michael Emmett BradyTroesken(T) has done an excellent job of demonstrating why lead was used in, and continued to be used in, water pipes over a period of 150 years despite a great deal of scientific and anecdotal evidence linking the lead to numerous physical ailments being available to city planners during this time period. The answer was that decision makers were penny wise and pound foolish. Lead water pipes were very cheap to build, long lasting, and easy to maintain. One area of discussion that should have been more heavily emphasized was the overwhelming connection between lead exposure and lower IQ scores. Lead exposure from birth to age 10 leads to a loss in IQ of from 6-10 points. The major groups impacted are black and Latino -Hispanic Americans getting their drinking water from city-metropolitan water systems. This accounts for about 40% to 67% of the alleged disparity in IQ scores that is supposed to exist between white and black Americans. These facts are ignored by Herrnstein and Murray in their book "The Bell Curve"(1994).

In *The Great Lead Water Pipe Disaster*, Werner Troesken looks at a long-running environmental and public health catastrophe: 150 years of lead pipes in local water systems and the associated sickness, premature death, political inaction, and social denial. The harmful effects of lead water pipes became apparent almost as soon as cities the world over began to install them. Doctors and scientists noted cases of acute illness and death attributable to lead in public water beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, and an editorial in the *New York Herald* called for the city to study the matter after a bizarre illness made headlines in 1868. But officials took no action for many years. New York City, for example, did not take any steps to reduce lead levels in water until 1992, long after the most serious damage had been done. By then, in any case, much of the old lead pipe had been replaced with safer materials. Troesken examines the health effects of lead exposure, analyzing cases from New York City, Boston, and Glasgow and many smaller towns in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and England. He draws on period accounts, government reports, court decisions, and economic and demographic analysis to document the widespread nature of the problem, the recognized health effects -- particularly for pregnant women and young children -- and official intransigence. He presents an accessible overview of the old and new science of lead exposure -- explaining, for example, why areas with soft water suffered more harmful effects than areas with hard water. And he gives us compelling and vivid accounts of the people and politics involved. The effects of lead in water continue to be felt; many older houses still have lead service pipes. *The Great Lead Water Pipe Disaster* is essential reading for understanding this past and ongoing public health problem.

Werner Troesken has written a fascinating detective story of a little-known environmental disaster. He shows that lead from water pipes killed and sickened millions without anyone realizing the culprit's identity. Underdeveloped scientific knowledge, cost considerations, municipal water-supply boosterism, and liability law led to a complete denial of the evidence. Essential for anyone interested in public health, science, history, or politics. (Dora Costa, Professor of Economics, MIT) A full and valuable discussion of a long-neglected public health problem. (Herbert Needleman, School of Medicine, University of Pittsburgh) Werner Troesken's superb analysis of a wide variety of sources makes a major contribution to both historical studies of health and medicine and to contemporary health policy debates. The problems created by lead water pipes existed in the United States and Britain for more than a century, and Troesken uses data past and present to detail the causes, effects, and consequences of the resulting health troubles, and how and why public officials avoided dealing with them. This is an important book for historians, public health

officials, and social scientists. (Stanley Engerman, John H. Munro Professor of Economics and Professor of History, University of Rochester, coauthor of *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*) *The Great Lead Pipe Disaster* is a fascinating read, one that in exploring the intersections of public health, public policy, science, and economics offers lessons and has implications far beyond the details of lead content in water. (Civil Engineering) A challenging and important contribution to our understanding of one of the great public health problems of the past two centuries -- lead and its pollution of the environment. Troesken has provided us with new insights, and we should applaud him for it. (American Scientist) Each chapter is wonderfully written in accessible language, and the author is meticulous with attributions and supporting evidence. (JAMA) About the Author Werner Troesken is Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh and Faculty Research Associate at NBER. He is the author of *Water, Race, and Disease* (MIT Press, 2004).