

Freshwater For Life Action Coalition: Will make statement regarding Milwaukee Water Quality Task Force report and recommendations

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Milwaukee – The Milwaukee Water Quality Task Force will convene it's last meeting on Friday, April 28, 2017.

It is anticipated that the task force will be releasing its final report and recommendations at this meeting.

The Freshwater For Life Action Coalition (FLAC) will be attending this meeting and will be giving statements regarding the task force report and recommendations.

"FLAC sent a letter to chairman Bohl addressing what the group saw were concerns the task force draft report and recommendations had. FLAC did not receive a response to our letter in which we made 14 recommendations. We will see tomorrow what the task force decided on", said Robert Miranda, FLAC Spokesperson.

A copy of the letter to Alderman Bohl is included below:

March 30, 2017

Alderman Jim Bohl

Milwaukee Common Council

Chairman, Milwaukee Water Quality Task Force

City Hall

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

53201

Dear Alderman Bohl:

The Freshwater for Life Action Coalition (FLAC) expresses our congratulations on your successful chairmanship of the Water Quality Task Force (WTQF) and we

extend to you and the members of the task force our gratitude and thank you for the leadership of the task force addressing the concerns around the quality of Milwaukee water, specifically addressing the more than 80,000 lead laterals that dot the Milwaukee landscape.

FLAC has reviewed the draft of the recommendations being proposed by the Task Force. Upon review of the draft FLAC wishes to express some concerns regarding the report and its recommendations.

The report, it appears, has the city taking on the notion that lead water is not as much a threat to public health as other sources of lead. The report fails in its recommendations to recognize the fact that lead water, unlike paint chips, dust and soil, is not something the public can see readily and report like they do lead paint chips. Testing water is proven to be hit or miss. Lead in water is not as visible as paint chips falling from the walls. The poisoning of families by lead laterals is a deadly game of aqua Russian roulette.

Unfortunately, in our opinion, the recommendations by the Milwaukee WQTF appears to not adequately make lead pipes and fixtures a public health crisis, which is disturbing.

FLAC recommends the following we believe the report fails to address and should consider adding to the recommendations portion of the WQTF report.

FLAC Recommendations:

1. Establish accountability measures for not achieving or moving on recommendations made by the task force.
2. Recommend that the Common Council direct the Milwaukee Water Works to outline an active plan to protect people from lead water exposure.
3. Create a time line, short and long term, to remove lead pipes from residences.
4. Recommend that Milwaukee Common Council initiate a mandate to create a strategic comprehensive plan to fund and remove lead pipes from Milwaukee residences. No mention of a strategic plan or long term removal plan with goals is mentioned.
5. Establish long term measures to educate residents about the need to continue to be vigilant and take precautions to protect from lead water poisoning is not adequately outlined.
6. Outline affordability of filters and replacements for all homes with lead laterals, specificity for low-income/fixed income homeowners.
7. Call for increased testing of water Milwaukee consumers receive via lead laterals, in particular, surpassing Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards the city follows.
8. Recommend that the Department of Public Works proceeds with incorporating a

plan that removes city water mains to include removal of lead laterals.

9. Recommend to the Milwaukee Common Council that it direct the Mayor to dedicate 25 to 50 percent of MWW revenue the Mayor receives for general funds as revenue to be used towards removing lead laterals on private property.

10. Recommend that Milwaukee Water Works includes filter replacement reminder notices to water customers every billing cycle.

11. Recommend water testing plan for residences where street construction is taking place and report test results to the Common Council in areas under construction.

12. Establish a biannual community information session that focuses on lead lateral removal efforts and report progress removing lead laterals from residences in the Milwaukee community.

13. Recommend review/reform current policy being utilized for testing and treating children for lead blood levels annually. Ensure City policies meet current EDA & CDC standards and report status to the Common Council annually.

14. Recommend that the Common Council direct Department of Public Works and Milwaukee Water Works to develop a plan that correctly identifies the number of lead laterals in Milwaukee.

In December of 2016, the Common Council approved an ordinance for funding the removal of lead service lines that experience leaks, breaks or other emergency repairs. The costs to property owners to pay out of pocket for such an emergency amounts to \$1,600 maximum to remove the lead service lines on privately-owned portion. The ordinance also covered administrative costs to oversee these replacements.

The report also cites additional funding from the State of Wisconsin's Safe Drinking Water Program, which will provide funding for lead service lines replacement of schools and daycares in 2017.

FLAC calls upon the Task Force to recommend that Mayor Barrett initiate a letter to the Public Service Commission (PSC) requesting that the PSC moves to approve authority for the City to use funds from the water utility to support full-lead lateral removal.

Ownership/control

Finally, FLAC continues to advocate for the City of Milwaukee to take ownership/control of lead laterals.

FLAC contends that after the United States banned lead laterals in 1986, the EPA started working on getting lead out of water leaching from pipes through the Safe Drinking Water Act, which required water utilities to undertake the replacement of all lead service lines – including those that went into privately owned homes and

buildings.

A few years later, 1993 to be exact, after lead contamination started making headlines across the country, water utilities started to claim that they didn't have the right to replace lead pipes on private property.

A lawsuit filed by the American Water Works Association trade group in 1993 changed the original rules and the federal mandate was struck down. In 2000, the EPA decided to revise the Lead and Copper Rule and in doing so put the cost of replacing lead pipes on private property the responsibility of homeowners. The 2000 revision created a slippery slope by giving water utilities nationwide the right to claim they have control of a smaller sections of once-public water lines.

The change in 2000 gifted sections of water pipes to residents, meaning homeowners have "control and ownership" of a portion of lead pipes - making the homeowner liable. Many home owners were not aware of the change that automatically made them owners of lead lateral on their side of the curb after this happened.

This we strongly believe is wrong.

There isn't any controversy over whether a gas or phone company has the right to go onto private land to fix a leaky pipe or a downed wire to address a public health hazard. FLAC views this as a public health crisis.

When the service lines were installed in the early 1880s to early 1900s and up until 1962, it was the City of Milwaukee who mandated using lead pipes.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Robert Miranda

FLAC, Spokesperson