

Wisconsin Environment: Proposed EPA lead rule fails to ensure safe drinking water

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MADISON - Yesterday in Green Bay, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its long-awaited proposal to update to the federal Lead and Copper Rule. Unfortunately, while the EPA's proposed rule offers some enhanced testing and monitoring, it lacks the bold action necessary to ensure safe drinking water for all Americans as soon as possible.

"As proposed, the EPA's long-awaited update to the Lead and Copper Rule falls far short of the decisive action needed to get the lead out of our drinking water," **said Megan Severson, Wisconsin Environment State Director.** "And in a few critical provisions, [the proposed rule](#) could even take us backwards. State and local leaders shouldn't wait for the EPA to solve this problem - we need action now to get the lead out."

"We know that lead is contaminating Wisconsinites' drinking water and putting public health at risk, including at our children's schools and daycares," **added WISPIRG Director Peter Skopec.** "We need to take decisive action to protect our kids from the irreversible, damaging impacts of lead. Passing Wisconsin [Senate Bills 423](#) and [424](#), which would require testing and remediation of lead in schools' and daycares' drinking water, would be a commonsense step in the right direction." [A March 2019 report by Wisconsin Environment and WISPIRG gave the state's policies an "F"](#) for failing to protect children from lead in drinking water at schools and daycares. The report found that, across the board, Wisconsin still lacks comprehensive policies to detect, disclose and remove lead from school drinking water.

Meanwhile, serious shortcomings of the EPA's proposed update to the federal Lead and Copper Rule announced yesterday include:

- **A complete failure to appropriately address lead service lines**

(LSLs). These toxic pipes remain the single greatest source of lead contamination of water at millions of homes, child care centers, and other places. A robust rule would order full replacement of all these toxic pipes within 10 years or less. Instead, the EPA would require an inventory of LSLs. And while current law requires water utilities out of compliance to remove lead service lines at a rate of 7 percent a year, the proposed rule would slow that pace to 3 percent per year.

- **Standards that are not health-based.** Health experts say that there is no safe level of lead in water. So while creating a warning threshold for lead of 10 parts per billion (ppb) is a step in the right direction, it is nowhere near the 1 ppb limit that pediatricians are urging schools to adopt, or even the 5 ppb standard that the FDA has set for bottled water.
- **No requirements to get the lead out of schools.** [Our research shows](#) that even though lead contaminates the drinking water in many schools, states are still failing to require action to correct it. Safeguarding water at our kids' schools and child care centers will require pro-actively replacing lead-laden faucets and fountains and installing filters certified to remove lead. Yet the proposed rule only requires limited and infrequent testing at schools that is unlikely to consistently detect contamination.

“The EPA’s proposed update of the lead and copper rule lacks the robust measures needed to get the lead out,” **concluded Wisconsin Environment’s Megan Severson.** “But there’s lots that our leaders can do right now to help get the lead out. The state legislature should pass SB423 and 424. And the EPA should listen carefully to public comments and seize this once in a generation opportunity to strengthen its rule and secure safe drinking water for all Americans.”