

Freshwater for Life Action Coalition: Mayor Barrett and city bureaucrats continue lead-in-water misinformation and obfuscation

Posted on Monday, Jul 26, 2021

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

The Freshwater for Life Action Coalition (FLAC) wants to be clear as possible when we say lead in our water is toxic and is a primary source of lead poisoning in Milwaukee households. First, let me point out that at no time it should be inferred that water is Milwaukee's main source of lead poisoning at all times.

We want to stress that sources of lead vary depending on people's circumstances—such as whether road work is being done near one's house.

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett asserts that paint is routinely the main source of lead poisoning in Milwaukee. This is NOT supported by experts and science.

Around the United States, municipalities have found water to be a primary (or even the only) source of lead poisoning. This may be true in Milwaukee, too, but we can't yet know because the city has gathered no accurate/well documented data sets to show the harm lead-in-water is doing. Understanding the extent of this danger is the very least the city should do.

A national lead water expert from Virginia Tech, keynote speaker at the 2016 water conference at Marquette University, said, "Milwaukee historically has been a world leader covering up lead water problems." Mayor Barrett failed to highlight this statement when he was having flashbacks of the conference during a community roundtable discussion with the Environmental Protection Agency. The cover-up continues today by Mayor Barrett's administration.

What data sets are Mayor Barrett and Alderman Nic Kovac using to back their claims lead water is not as much a threat to public health as lead paint? Milwaukee data regarding lead water was not sufficient two years ago according to the Public Health Foundation independent audit as discussed in the July 15th Milwaukee

Common Council Public Safety and Health Committee meeting. Yet, the city resists collecting key data to assess — and then address! — the lead-contaminated water in Milwaukee homes.

Many families who spoke with FLAC have had their homes assessed by the Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) because of high lead blood levels harming children. These families insist their children didn't eat paint chips or soil. As for dust, they argue their children don't go around the house sniffing floors, window ledges or levitate from their bed/cribs randomly inhaling deeply near vents or the air generally around them.

Many of these families have told FLAC that when MHD officials come to assess their homes for lead, often they are told the water will be tested later because the water person from Milwaukee Water Works (MWW) was not available. Many of these families not only have not witnessed their water being tested, they were never later told if the water was tested for lead once they've had to relocate to another living space. Documents they received from the MHD show positive lead results for lead paint, soil and dust. Yet nothing in those documents indicate lead water test results. Moreover, the GIS mapping FLAC/GTLO presented to a special meeting of the Milwaukee Common Council Public Safety and Health Committee in March, 2019, reported to the committee that lead-in-water has a much bigger effect on public health than Mayor Barrett and city bureaucrats are willing to admit to. Alderman Robert Bauman laughed at the statement and began to make the meeting a side show.

Until Milwaukee government improves their procedures and data sets, and documents lead-in-water testing more accurately, Mayor Barrett has no evidence to justify his narrative that lead paint is the primary source of lead poisoning in Milwaukee and Alderman Nic Kovac's absurd and unsubstantiated assertion that removing lead pipes will not greatly improve public health remains groundless. **THE ONLY WAY TO BE SURE LEAD POISONING IS BEING DEFEATED IS TO INVEST IN REMOVING ALL SOURCES OF LEAD FROM OUR HOMES.** It's that simple folks! That require making Milwaukee families a priority. That also would require channeling city dollars away from building more pretty districts in Camelot. Investing city dollars towards increasing lead abatement in neighborhoods with high concentration of lead must be a priority. But that won't happen under this administration. You can't build a city on pity is Mayor Barrett's philosophy it seems, a philosophy inherited from former Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist. Remove the pipes! Water is life!