

Durbin & Duckworth seek EPA review of lead rule and urge notification of residents about risks

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Representative Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) asked the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to review the effectiveness of a regulation that controls lead and copper in water and

establish a limit for lead in drinking water that is consistent with its health risks. Durbin and Duckworth also urged the EPA to work with state and local officials to notify the public immediately when lead contamination has been found.

“This is troubling as almost 80 percent of Chicago homes are connected to lead-containing pipelines and public health officials agree that there is no safe level of lead. Lead is a known neurotoxin that can cause irreversible brain damage, lower IQ scores, developmental delays, behavior issues, and even death,” said the Illinois members. “The current tragedy in Flint, Michigan, is a startling example of what can happen when these issues go untreated. The EPA must not wait until another city faces a lead contamination water crisis before acting.”

The Illinois members’ call follows a [*Chicago Tribune* report](#) on lead contamination in drinking water due to aging water infrastructure in Chicago. The report cited a 2013 EPA study which uncovered the presence of elevated levels of lead in the drinking water of half the Chicago homes it tested. The study showed that the EPA’s lead and copper rule misses the high lead levels and potential human exposure.

Text of the letter is below:

February 9, 2016

We write to express our concern over the lead contamination that has been reported in Chicago’s drinking water and request the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) use its full authority and resources to address the issue.

Recent articles in the *Chicago Tribune* and other news outlets have highlighted that legacy water infrastructure containing lead pipes has caused lead to contaminate the drinking water sources of homes across the county. In Chicago, a 2013 peer-reviewed EPA study published in the scientific journal *Environmental Science & Technology* reported the presence of elevated levels of lead in the drinking water of half the Chicago homes it tested. In addition, the study showed “the existing regulatory sampling protocol under the U.S. Lead and Copper Rule systematically misses the high lead levels and potential human exposure.”

This is troubling as almost 80 percent of Chicago homes are connected to lead-containing pipelines and public health officials agree that there is no safe level of lead. Lead is a known neurotoxin that can cause irreversible brain damage, lower IQ scores, developmental delays, behavior issues, and even death.

The current tragedy in Flint, Michigan, is a startling example of what can happen when these issues go untreated. The EPA must not wait until another city faces a lead contamination water crisis before acting. As the 2013 study makes clear, the current Lead and Copper Rule protocols fail to effectively protect public health.

We urge EPA to swiftly review the effectiveness of the Lead and Copper Rule and propose any necessary revisions to better detect and prevent harmful contaminants in public water systems and establish a limit for lead in drinking water that is consistent with its health risks. We also urge the EPA to work with state and local officials to notify the public immediately when lead contamination has been found. Additionally, please identify what actions EPA has taken and identify any additional authorities the agency may need to fully address this problem. Your attention to this issue is critical as EPA is the last line of defense in safeguarding public drinking water.