

# **Durbin, Duckworth Lead Colleagues In Call To EPA To Strengthen The Lead And Copper Rule To Replace Harmful Lead Pipes**

by Maddie Carlos & Ben Garmisa  
October 26 2022 10:23 AM



WASHINGTON – During National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), a member of the Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works, along with 13 of

their Senate colleagues, wrote to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in support of steps they have taken to develop and implement the Biden Administration's historic Lead Pipe and Paint Action Plan. In light of EPA's decision to draft Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI) in accordance with Executive Order 13990, the Senators emphasized the need to strengthen and enforce the Lead and Copper Rule (LCR), including to require water systems to replace often century-old and deteriorating lead pipes over the coming decade. They also urged EPA to ensure that lead in school and child care center drinking water is prioritized, with emphasis on disadvantaged communities and communities with the highest cumulative impact of lead exposures.

"Lead service lines (LSLs) pose an unacceptable health threat and disproportionately plague older, lower-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Black children especially have higher blood lead levels, and are more likely to be poisoned by lead than white children and more likely to live in communities with LSLs. There is a concerning lack of data on lead presence in drinking water and LSLs in Native American communities, preventing mitigation measures from reaching those most in need. Disadvantaged low-income communities and communities of color are at greater cumulative risk from lead and as such they must be the top funding priority," the Senators wrote.

Lead is a known neurotoxin that can cause irreversible brain damage that results in lower IQ scores, developmental delays, and behavior issues. According to a recent [Guardian article](#) which examined the dangerous influence of the lead industry since 1933, lead pipes feed water to 400,000 homes in Chicago and will take at least \$8 billion to address.

The Biden Administration is committed to replacing 100 percent of lead pipes. The *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (IIJA), which the Senators supported, allocated \$2.9 billion to EPA for states, Tribes, and territories to remove LSLs and \$11.7 billion to the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), which can be used for LSL removal.

The Senators continued, "The IIJA provides more than \$15 billion towards this goal, and we continue to support additional funding to address lead in drinking water. Federal funding is already at work in our states, many of which are leading on full LSL replacement, and EPA should ensure the rest of the nation does so as well. To illustrate the impact such funding can have, replacement of Illinois' at least 686,000 lead lines, representing 12.5 percent of the nation's lead lines, could generate 87,841 to 224,500 jobs and \$9 billion to \$23 billion in economic activity."

The Senators also strongly urged EPA to adopt a strong LCR by the end of 2023. Among other measures, this rule should strengthen monitoring requirements to ensure

lead presence is detected; update treatment requirements to ensure water is less corrosive and lead is not released into tap water from plumbing; reduce the Action Level for lead to no higher than five parts per billion; and strengthen reporting, public education, and notification requirements, to ensure the public receives straightforward and honest information about the risk of lead in tap water. They also stated EPA's rule must require immediate action to prevent lead exposure at child care facilities and schools and develop a long-term plan to expeditiously remove lead pipes and fixtures that contain lead from facilities that host our nation's youth.

The Senators concluded, "Our constituents deserve to know what is in their drinking water and to test for pollutants easily and regularly from their own taps. We strongly encourage EPA to approve scientifically developed and peer-reviewed user-friendly, at-home kits to test for contaminants in water systems. Such test kits should be inexpensive, fast-acting, and easy to use, akin to the at-home health tests that proliferated during the pandemic. This is critical to tackling the challenges of lead pipe replacement and ensuring LCR compliance nationwide. We share EPA's commitment to safe and healthy lives for all Americans and we look forward to working together to address this public health issue."

In addition to Durbin and Duckworth, Senators Gary Peters (D-MI), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Jack Reed (D-RI), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Ed Markey (D-MA), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) signed onto the letter

The letter is endorsed by the Metropolitan Planning Council, Alliance for the Great Lakes, Illinois Pipe Trades Association, Elevate, Earthjustice, Environmental Law & Policy Center, Natural Resources Defense Council, and WE ACT for Environmental Justice.

The full text of the letter can be found [here](#).