



Re: EPA-HQ-OW-2022-0801, National Primary Drinking Water Regulations for Lead and Copper: Improvements

To Whom It May Concern,

We are the Health and Environmental Justice Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Flint Branch. Our committee includes public health and medical professionals that work to address health and environmental concerns and inequities in the Flint and Genesee County community. Lead exposure during the Flint Water Crisis has negatively impacted our community so we believe in the importance of strong lead regulations that focus on prevention and mitigation via equitable approaches and policies.

We would like to provide feedback on the National Primary Drinking Water Regulations for Lead and Copper: Improvements, Docket EPA-HQ-OW-2022-0801. In November 2023, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released improvements to the Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) that provide a critical step to reduce lead in drinking water over the next ten years. We have recommendations that would strengthen these protections to prevent further exposure to lead in environmental justice communities.

Weak lead exposure regulations fail to protect the most vulnerable populations in our community. In Flint, the vulnerable populations include the Black and Brown community, low income households, youth and seniors. Flint is home to approximately 80,000 residents and the median household income is \$35,000. There is a large Black and Brown community in Flint, with 56% identifying as African American. Because of sensitive periods of neurodevelopment, it is imperative that kids are protected from the irreversible harms of lead exposure. Here in Flint, 24% of the population is under 18 years and 6.7% of the population is under 5 years. Lead exposure is also particularly harmful for seniors age 65 and up, who make up 13% of the population in Flint. (Census, 2023)

The EPA's proposal for lead service line replacement is valid but we encourage more robust systems for tracking and stringent regulation of the process across the country. There should be consequences for water systems that do not replace the lead service lines within 10 years. Additionally, it is recommended that lead service line replacement be an opt out procedure in order to be inclusive and equitable in communities where communication is challenging and households residents are not the homeowner. The replacement of lead service lines should be completed and implemented in the most efficient, effective, and equitable way to eliminate exposure to lead and protect public health. There should also be financial prioritization of lead service line replacement in environmental justice communities.

The EPA's proposal for reducing complexity and improving public health protection was fair, but we encourage this rule to go even further to protect public health. Given that there is no safe level of lead in drinking water, NAACP Flint Branch demands that the federal action level be lowered from 15 ppb, not only to 10 ppb as proposed here, but to 1 ppb to provide the strongest protection possible.

Transparency and communication are vital to maintain and build public trust which is essential for safeguarding public health and eliminating health disparities, especially in environmental justice communities. The EPA should have a public notification process that has diverse communication options including digital (website, social media, radio) and in person (flyers, church announcements, etc) to effectively educate and inform communities. Equitable communication strategies would assist residents in lead exposure notification and alert them to when water-related work is occurring in a timely manner.

Finally, the proposal includes a cost-benefit analysis for making improvements to the Lead and Copper rule. As residents of Flint, we can assure you that there is no dollar amount that could compare to the cost of human life or the irreversible harm caused by lead exposure. In environmental justice communities all across the country, there are people who depend on the government to put forward rules that truly protect our health and well-being no matter the cost.

In closing we appreciate you taking the time to read our comments. Please consider incorporating stricter regulations and stronger protections for drinking water to protect the health of the most vulnerable among us.

Sincerely,

NAACP Flint Branch #3136
Health and Environmental Justice Committee

REFERENCE

2023 Census - <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/flintcitymichigan/PST045223>