



The Honorable Michael S. Regan, Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

August 24, 2023

RE: Ensuring Safe Drinking Water at School through the Lead and Copper Rule

Dear Administrator Regan,

On behalf of millions of American families, educators and concerned citizens, we urge you to propose updates to the federal Lead & Copper Rule (LCR) that ensure safe drinking water where kids go to learn and play each day.

Lead contamination of drinking water is a serious, longstanding and widespread public health threat. A key reason this problem persists is that the LCR has only required action when highly variable testing detects lead above a certain action level. To finally ensure safe drinking water for all Americans, the EPA must transform the LCR from a “test and fix” policy to one that prevents lead contamination at every drinking water tap.

For the broader population, the most important step in this prevention policy is for the LCR to require water utilities to fully replace all lead service lines within 10 years. These 9+ million toxic pipes are the [single greatest source of lead contamination](#) for buildings served by them. President Biden has repeatedly stated a goal of removing all of these pipes within a decade, and Congress has provided unprecedented funding for that purpose. EPA should follow [New Jersey](#) and [Rhode Island](#) in making the administration’s 10 year goal an enforceable reality.

In our schools, however, ensuring safe drinking water for children and educators will require additional action as well. Lead is toxic at low levels and especially damaging to children — impairing how they

[learn, grow and behave](#). Most schools are likely to have lead in their plumbing and/or fixtures, and lead contamination of schools' drinking water is [widespread](#).

Moreover, unlike other water utilities, school districts regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act have full control of their water delivery systems - from source water to tap. Accordingly, the LCR can and should require the following for regulated school districts:

- **Filter first:** Install and maintain point of use filters certified to remove lead on all taps used for drinking water, cooking or beverage preparation. A number of school districts have already embraced a "filter first" approach - from [Portland](#) to the District of Columbia. This short-term, low-cost intervention is critical.
- **Set a health-based limit for schools:** the LCR's current Action Level for lead is simply too high to protect public health. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting lead in schools' water to no more than [1 part per billion \(ppb\)](#). [San Diego](#) and Austin are among school districts already embracing this health-based limit. EPA should apply this standard for school districts under authority of the LCR and model it for jurisdictions that are not.
- **Get the lead out:** lead-bearing fixtures and plumbing should be replaced - especially where filters cannot be mounted at the point water leaves the tap. For example, fountains should be replaced with new water stations (with filters) as [Philadelphia schools](#) are now required to do, and faucets should be replaced whenever under-sink filters are installed. New and replacement fixtures should meet the Q₁ standard recently adopted by [California](#), where lead leached into water is less than or equal to 1 ppb. The LCR also needs to require full replacement of lead service lines at schools as soon as possible.

In addition to these requirements for school districts regulated by the LCR, EPA should also incorporate policy changes that will better prevent lead contamination at all other schools:

- Establish a preference for awarding grants under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other programs to school districts installing and maintaining filters, rather than simply funding more testing.
- Change the name of EPA's [3 Ts Guidance](#) to "Preventing Lead Contamination at Every Tap" and replace its "test-and-fix" recommendations with the prevention-oriented measures outlined above for LCR-regulated schools.

America's children and educators need safe drinking water to thrive and be healthy. We hope you will act boldly to meet that public health need.

Sincerely,

National Parent Teacher Association

National Education Association

Environment America Research & Policy Center

U.S. PIRG Education Fund

cc: Radhika Fox, Assistant Administrator for Water
Sara Gonzalez-Rothi, Senior Director for Water, CEQ