
From: Murray, David (GOV)
Sent: Friday, October 02, 2015 10:48 AM
To: Wurfel, Sara (GOV); Wurfel, Brad (DEQ); Lasher, GERALYN (DHHS); Minicuci, Angela (DHHS); Eisner, Jennifer (DHHS); Tommasulo, Karen (DEQ); Agen, Jarrod (GOV); Biehl, Laura (GOV); Heaton, Anna (GOV); Kennedy, Jordan (GOV)
Subject: Draft of Free Press guest column
Attachments: 2 DRAFT freep editorial short 092015.docx

Team, this draft of the Free Press guest column builds on Brad's good work with slight changes. This one has a different audience than the MLive column and a different approach. Let us know if you require any changes.

Thank you for all you do.

Dave

By Nick Lyon and Dan Wyant

The health and safety of Michigan residents is always the state government's top priority.

That's why state regulatory leaders were disappointed by recent Free Press editorials mischaracterizing Lansing's oversight of the City of Flint's drinking water system. The paper's portrayal of the state as uncaring about drinking water quality and the community's exposure to lead are simply off the mark.

State and federal regulators run programs to monitor lead in drinking water and in kids' blood levels specifically to track lead impacts on our communities. Lead is a real concern, particularly in children, and we take our responsibility seriously.

But it is important to remember that lead is all around us. It is in soils, deposited for decades by leaded fuel and industrial processes. It is paint, in homes built in the mid-1970s or earlier. And it is unfortunately common in the plumbing and service connections of older homes, which is why the DEQ requires community water sources around the state to track and record it and take steps when levels surpass federal action thresholds.

Let's be clear: The Flint River is not contributing lead. The water leaving the drinking water plant is clean and safe. The water traveling through the distribution system also is free of lead. The lead issues are the result of water in homes that have lead service lines or lead plumbing.

And because the contamination factor is at the homeowner level, it is difficult to track or assess with the kind of specificity customers would like to think regulators have. Two homes on the same block might have very different results from lead testing, based on what kind of plumbing they have and how homeowners use their water.

Emerging data from local doctors, however, added to our knowledge enough to spark some unusual precautionary actions. They reported to the media that blood lead levels in Flint kids at their offices are up this year. It's still early to know exactly what that means, but because lead is a serious threat

to children's development, we have decided to take some aggressive short-term precautionary measures and do more to learn exactly what is happening in the city.

The state today joined with local and federal authorities to present a comprehensive action plan designed to produce a clearer picture of lead in the community's water, offer immediate protection for its kids and families with corrosion control and free lead water filters, review and audit testing protocols, and immediately assess the schools to reassure parents their kids are not exposed to lead at the drinking fountains.

We're bringing help to people who need it. And we're also giving people accurate information so they can be confident that the water they drink and bathe their children with is safe. Critics in the community and at the Free Press have said we have been slow to respond to Flint's drinking water concerns. The truth is that local, state and federal authorities have been paying very close attention to Flint's drinking water all along, but we have the responsibility to check facts and use the knowledge we have to develop responsible, meaningful strategies that will help everyone clearly understand the real risk level and take appropriate actions.

We will be transparent with all we are doing and everything we determine. But Flint residents should also recognize our ultimate success depends on their help. Residents with lead concerns can have their home water tested -- for free. Parents of younger kids should have their children get free blood lead level testing at the local community health department. And state leaders are using emergency funds and working closely with community groups and donors to provide faucet water filters to all Flint homes.

We are committed to doing all we can to protect drinking water and public health, in Flint and the rest of Michigan. The plan set forth should send the strong signal that residents can be assured the city, state and federal regulators are accountable, forthright and working hard to protect them.

It is the community's responsibility to take the steps available to them as well. Ensuring public health is a public service, but the public can play a key role.

Learn more at Michigan.gov/FlintDrinkingWater

Nick Lyon is the director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Dan Wyant is the director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Dave Murray

Deputy Press Secretary | Executive Office of Governor Rick Snyder

MurrayD1@michigan.gov

517-335-6397, office

 mobile

Twitter: @michigandmurray

