



W E E K L Y U P D A T E November 24, 2015

In This Issue

[NEMWI Provides Recommendations to Improve Public Health Protection of the Federal Lead and Copper Rule](#)

[Soo Locks Study Approved](#)

QUICK LINKS

[Northeast-Midwest Institute](#)

[Mississippi River Basin Blog](#)

[News](#)

NEMWI Provides Recommendations to Improve Public Health Protection of the Federal Lead and Copper Rule

In connection with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (USEPA) National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC) meeting last week, NEMWI's Elin Betanzo provided [recommendations](#) for improving the public health protection of the federal Lead and Copper Rule (LCR). Millions of lead service lines deliver water to homes served by public water utilities in the older cities of the Northeast-Midwest region, and the safety of that water is governed by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and the LCR. The NDWAC met in Arlington, VA on November 17-19, 2015 to

discuss revisions to the rule. The NEMWI policy paper summarizes requirements that are necessary for the LCR to deliver the public health protection it was intended to provide, especially for homes with lead service lines.

Lead-in-water crises in Washington, DC and Flint, MI have revealed inconsistencies in lead monitoring that result in an underestimation of exposure to and risk of lead in drinking water under the current LCR, and these problems are not limited to those cities. The USEPA has planned for "long-term" revisions to the LCR since the lead-in-water crisis in Washington, DC that came to light in 2004.

At last week's meeting, the NDWAC considered and endorsed a set of [recommendations](#) proposed by the LCR Working Group, which include the following provisions: weaken required monitoring for lead at customer taps, require public water systems to only make "meaningful" efforts at full lead service line replacement, and continue to allow the practice of partial lead service line replacement (known to provide no net reduction in lead exposures, and sometimes increase lead concentrations at the tap leading to increased incidence of childhood lead poisoning and adverse pregnancy outcomes). Adoption of the LCR Working Group's recommendations may substantially weaken public health protection under the rule. The NEMWI policy paper summarizes requirements that, when added to the Work Group recommendations, will ensure that the public health protections of the LCR are increased and not reduced.

The NDWAC's deliberations come on the heels of the lead-in-water crisis in Flint, MI where citywide lead poisoning was documented while the public water system was considered in compliance with the existing Lead and Copper Rule. In Washington DC, higher incidence of lead poisoning was also associated with occurrence of lead service lines while the city was allegedly meeting the EPA standards. The recent events in Flint, MI illustrate that the 25-year-old Lead and Copper Rule urgently needs to be revised to increase its clarity and enforceability, and reinforce its capacity to protect sensitive populations.

For more information, contact [Elin Betanzo](#), Sr. Policy Analyst, at the Northeast-Midwest Institute.

Soo Locks Study Approved

The Army Corps of Engineers and the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) have agreed to proceed with a \$1.35 million study to analyze the costs and benefits of an additional shipping lock in Sault Ste. Marie, MI (Soo Locks), which connect Lakes Huron and Superior. Currently, the Soo Locks are made up of four locks, two of which are not operational (Davis and Sabin locks). Only one of the operational locks, Poe, is large enough to handle the largest freighters, which transport the majority of cargo. In June, Michigan Senators Stabenow and Peters [wrote](#) to OMB urging approval for the Army Corps' funding request for the locks expansion study. More recently, the House Great Lakes Task Force leaders circulated a letter addressed to Assistant Secretary Jo-Ellen Darcy, urging the expeditious completion of the Army Corps' Economic Reevaluation Report for replacing the Davis and Sabin Locks at Sault Ste. Marie. More details about the study and the Soo Locks are available [here](#).

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