



Environmental Justice Task Force

Remediating Lead in Drinking Water

Because Unitarian Universalist principles promote a belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being, we feel called to object to the current inaction on addressing lead in New Jersey's drinking water. A 2017 report by New Jersey Future points out that 200,000 of New Jersey's children under the age of 6 have high levels of lead in their blood. According to the Center for Disease Control, even low levels of lead exposure can stunt children's healthy brain development. Children under 6 years old in New Jersey are required to be tested for lead, and therefore act as "lead detectors," indicating the extent and location of lead exposure from all sources, including drinking water, as well as lead paint, toys, contaminated soils, and other sources¹.

Lead is a toxic metal that can be harmful to human health even at low exposure levels. According to the EPA, it is persistent and can bio-accumulate in the body. Young children, infants, and fetuses are particularly vulnerable to lead because the physical and behavioral effects of lead occur at lower exposure levels in children than in adults. In children, low levels of exposure have been linked to damage to the central and peripheral nervous system, learning disabilities, shorter stature, impaired hearing, and impaired formation and function of blood cells. The Safe Drinking Water Act requires EPA to determine the level of contaminants in drinking water at which no adverse health effects are likely to occur with an adequate margin of safety. EPA has set the maximum contaminant level goal for lead in drinking water at zero².

Like most of the country, New Jersey's drinking water sources do not contain lead. Rather, our older water pipes and plumbing fixtures and fittings contaminate treated drinking water with lead en route to the tap. Replacing these pipes and fixtures is costly, and the burden of the cost often falls on the homeowner.

Lead appears in the drinking water of schools across New Jersey. It is present in schools in all geographic regions, and in urban, suburban, and rural areas. In the fall of 2017, NJ Spotlight reported that nearly 400 schools found lead in at least one drinking water outlet in the building in state-mandated testing of all water in all districts.

Unitarian Universalists, along with many others, believe that access to clean drinking water should be a fundamental right of all residents. To this end, the UUFANJ will work with public and private entities to reduce exposure to lead in drinking water in schools, homes, and all public and government spaces and businesses that service children. Specifically we will:

- 1.Reduce exposure in schools. Support the recommendations of New Jersey Future's 2017 report *Lead in School Drinking Water in New Jersey*.
- 2.Support recommendations of New Jersey Joint Legislative Task force on Drinking Water Infrastructure, particularly with regard to providing funding for replacing lead service lines.
- 3.Support/create an outreach campaign to educate parents about lead exposure from drinking water in their homes, and advocate for providing access to low-cost methods of household water testing.

¹ New Jersey Future, Lead in School Drinking Water, 2017 Executive Summary, P 2

² EPA Website <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/basic-information-about-lead-drinking-water>

