Message

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Subject: FW: Benton Harbor newsclips 10/08/21

FYI

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Cc: Singer, Joshua <Singer.Joshua@epa.gov>
Subject: FW: Benton Harbor newsclips 10/08/21

Benton Harbor newsclips 10/08/21

https://www.heraldpalladium.com/communities/benton_harbor/benton-harbor-residents-urged-to-use-bottled-water/article_5078c4e5-a66f-528e-9556-1307db97c0dc.html

Benton Harbor residents urged to use bottled water

Amid lead crisis, safe drinking water being dispersed

By LOUISE WREGE HP Staff Writer

22 hrs ago

BENTON HARBOR — State health officials are recommending Benton Harbor residents use bottled water for cooking, drinking, brushing teeth, rinsing foods and mixing powdered infant formula due to elevated levels of lead in tap water that's been tested.

"Protecting the health and safety of Benton Harbor residents is a top priority," said Elizabeth Hertel, director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, in a joint news release with Michigan Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. "We've listened to the community's concerns and out of an abundance of caution, we are recommending that residents use bottled water for cooking, drinking and brushing teeth."

In a statement released Wednesday, state officials said unfiltered tap water can be used for showering or bathing, for washing hands, dishes, clothes and for cleaning.

Benton Harbor has been under a state advisory for lead since October 2018, when routine summer sampling found higher-than-acceptable levels of lead in some of the city's tap water.

According to the state advisory at the time, eight of the 30 Benton Harbor homes tested for lead over the summer of 2018 were above the action level of 15 parts per billion (ppb) for lead, and the 90th percentile of the samples was 22 ppb for lead.

Since then, the city has been required to test a sampling of homes every six months.

The latest sampling done this summer found 11 out to 78 homes tested for lead were above the action level, with the 90th percentile at 24 ppb.

Shortly after the city was put under a state advisory, the Berrien County Health Department started giving out free water filters and cartridges to residents to filter the lead out of the water.

Wednesday's news release stated the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is conducting a filter effectiveness study to gather data and provide confidence in the effectiveness of water filters to reduce lead in drinking water.

"The study is being conducted as an assurance measure and free bottled water will be provided as long as needed," according to the release. "Further information on the completion date of the study will be shared by EPA when available."

The state said more than 4,500 cases of bottled water have been delivered to the city, with another 15,500 on the way.

Bottled water is available at the following locations and dates:

4-6 p.m. Thursday at the Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency, 331 Miller St., Benton Harbor.

2-6 p.m. Friday at God's Household of Faith, 275 Pipestone, Benton Harbor.

Additional dates and locations are expected to be added. Information will be posted on Michigan.gov/MiLeadSafe.

MDHHS can be reached at 866-691-5323 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday for additional information about lead.

This action is part of an accelerated, across-the-board effort by multiple governmental and community organizations to reduce the risk of exposure to lead in drinking water while the city replaces all lead service lines.

Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad said Wednesday that he's grateful for all of the support from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and the state and federal agencies to help city residents get access to safe drinking water.

"Cooperation, collaboration and coordination are the key ingredients moving forward to replace lead service lines and ensure that every resident is protected as we work to solve the water issues in Benton Harbor," he said.

According to the EPA, lead can cause irreversible and life-long effects including decreasing IQ, focus and academic achievement, especially in children.

https://www.woodtv.com/news/michigan/high-lead-levels-force-benton-harbor-residents-to-rely-on-bottled-water/

High lead levels force Benton Harbor residents to rely on bottled water

MICHIGAN
by: David Horak

Posted: Oct 7, 2021 / 08:20 PM EDT / Updated: Oct 7, 2021 / 08:22 PM EDT

BENTON HARBOR, Mich. (WOOD) — Off the heels of the Flint Water Crisis, another Michigan city is dealing with one of their own.

High levels of lead contamination in Benton Harbor led to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services urging residents to not drink or cook with the water coming from their taps and faucets.

Michigan's action lead level — when state leaders would step in and respond — is 15 parts per billion. Data from the city of Benton Harbor shows the highest reading from sampled homes rose from 60 parts per billion to 889 parts per billion over the last three years. It is more than 59 times the state limit.

While federal regulators are looking into the effectiveness of the water filters at the city's treatment plant, the state is responding by delivering water filters and more than 15,000 cases of bottles to various communities affected by the contamination.

Benton Harbor urged to use bottled water due to lead risk

On Thursday, people lined up their vehicles all along Second and Miller streets to pick up cases of water at the Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency, arriving two hours early at most.

One of them was Louise Robinson, who lives on fixed income with disability. She is wondering why she is paying $100 every month for a utility she cannot use safely.

"We pay it and we can't use it, so I don't understand," Robinson said. "This has been off and on for a while now. I can't even remember exactly how long."

According to state leaders, adjustments were made to corrosion control phosphates in the water system. They hope that will help coat the lead pipes, allowing water to pass through safely.

As for a long-term solution, the city says they began replacing the 888 lead service lines back in 2019 with help from a $5.6 million Environmental Protection Agency grant and another $10 million from last week's passing of the state budget.

The work on the century-old infrastructure is expected to finish no earlier than 2023.

https://www.cbsnews.com/news/benton-harbor-michigan-lead-water/

Benton Harbor, Michigan, residents urged to use bottled water due to lead concerns

UPDATED ON: OCTOBER 7, 2021 / 5:16 PM / CBS NEWS

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services on Wednesday recommended residents of Benton Harbor rely on bottled water instead of tap water as a precautionary measure while various agencies work to decrease the risk of lead exposure. Activist groups say lead in the city's drinking water has been a "persistent, widespread, and severe public health crisis" for at least the past three years.

"Protecting the health and safety of Benton Harbor residents is a top priority," the state health department director Elizabeth Hertel said in a statement. "We've listened to the community's concerns, we are recommending that residents use bottled water for cooking, drinking and brushing teeth."

Under the advisory, bottled water will be made available at various distribution sites throughout the city. More than 4,500 cases of bottled water have been delivered to Benton Harbor to date, with another 15,500 cases expected to be delivered within coming days, according to the Michigan health department.

Benton Harbor residents can still use unfiltered water for bathing, cleaning, and washing hands, dishes, and clothes, the department said.

Health officials said free bottled water "will be provided as long as needed" while the Environmental Protection Agency conducts a study on filter effectiveness. The EPA did not say when the study is expected to be completed.

"Cooperation, collaboration and coordination are the key ingredients moving forward to replace lead service lines and ensure that every resident is protected as we work to solve the water issues in Benton Harbor," Mayor Marcus Muhammad said.

The initiative comes following pressure from environmental and public advocacy organizations, who say the drinking water in the city presents "an imminent and substantial endangerment to Benton Harbor residents."

On September 9, organizations including the Benton Harbor Community Water Council, Flint Rising and the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition filed a petition to the EPA, demanding "immediate action to address the public health emergency."

According to the petition, the predominantly Black population in Benton Harbor has dealt with high levels of lead in drinking water since the summer of 2018. The city is the only water system in Michigan to exceed the EPA's lead action level threshold six consecutive times and has not had its lead service lines in the city replaced in years, violating federal and state requirements, the organizations wrote.

"Benton Harbor's residents are not only subjected to a disproportionately high level of lead exposure from a variety of sources beyond their drinking water but also often lack access to high-quality health care and are exposed to a wide array of other threats that can exacerbate the negative health effects associated with lead exposure," the petition reads.

The EPA says there is no known safe level of lead in a child's blood and that the negative health effects of drinking water with a lead presence include behavioral issues, a lower IQ, hyperactivity, slowed growth, anemia, cardiovascular effects, decreased kidney function and reproductive problems.

The groups allege the EPA, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) and other agencies have consistently failed to ensure timely action in responding to the high lead levels.

Following the petition's release, EGLE said on September 30 that it was working to permanently reduce the excessive lead levels in the water by replacing all lead service lines within the city. The agency also said free bottled drinking water would be made available to Benton Harbor residents on that day.

A representative for MDHHS and EGLE told CBS News on Thursday that they "are committed to working with the City of Benton Harbor to reduce lead in their drinking water" and that they "have

been working collaboratively with the City of Benton Harbor since 2018 when lead was found in the city's drinking water at levels above state standards."

The EPA told CBS News that certified and properly installed water filters are "very effective in reducing lead concentrations in drinking water" and that filters have been made available and will continue to be made available by the State.

"The agency will continue to be involved to support and monitor the effectiveness of the immediate interventions and development of long-term solutions in Benton Harbor," a representative for the EPA said.

https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2021/10/06/michigan-benton-harbor-bottled-water-elevated-lead-levels/6029756001/

Benton Harbor urged to use bottled water due to lead risk
Ed White
Associated Press

Michigan on Wednesday urged residents of Benton Harbor to use only bottled water for cooking and drinking, a major shift in response to the city's elevated levels of lead.

The state recently said it would distribute free water and filters in the southwestern Michigan city. But federal regulators now are reviewing how effective the filters are in removing lead from water at certain levels, according to the health department.

The state said more than 15,000 cases of water will be delivered in coming days to the predominantly Black and mostly low income community.

"We think they probably are effective," health department director Elizabeth Hertel said of the filters.

“Right now don’t use the water for cooking or drinking, even the filtered water, until we can guarantee the efficacy of those filters,” Hertel told The Associated Press.

She didn't know how long it would take. Filters so far have been given to more than 2,600 homes, the department said.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said it's evaluating how filters perform specifically on Benton Harbor's water chemistry.

“Certified filters that are properly installed and maintained are very effective in reducing lead concentrations in drinking water,” the EPA said, citing studies.

A local activist, the Rev. Edward Pinkney, said he has boxes of filters at his church. He's pleased with the state's emphasis on bottled water but said residents need to hear a stronger message.

“The water is unsafe to use. Period. Any use. That will get more attention around here,” Pinkney said.

Benton Harbor, population 9,600, is in Berrien County, 100 miles from Chicago. Pinkney and environmental groups have accused Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s administration and local officials of failing to adequately respond since lead contamination was discovered three years ago.

Whitmer has called for spending $20 million in Benton Harbor to replace nearly 6,000 service lines, most suspected of containing lead, within five years.

Lead is considered harmful at any level, and children are particularly vulnerable because it can slow growth and result in learning and behavior problems.

Two hundred miles away in Flint, lead contamination occurred in 2014-15 because water pulled from a river wasn’t properly treated to reduce corrosion in old pipes. The river was tapped as a cost-saving move by managers appointed by then-Gov. Rick Snyder.

Benton Harbor, like many communities in western Michigan, gets its water from Lake Michigan. The problem apparently is the condition of the water after it is treated and moves through an aging distribution system into homes.

While recommending that residents use bottled water, the state still urged them to run their faucets or bathtubs daily to keep tap water moving.

https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2021/10/benton-harbor-residents-urged-to-use-bottled-water-amid-lead-crisis.html

Benton Harbor residents urged to use bottled water amid lead crisis

Updated: Oct. 07, 2021, 10:38 a.m. | Published: Oct. 06, 2021, 3:07 p.m.

By Garret Ellison | gellison@mlive.com
BENTON HARBOR, MI — Michigan health officials are advising Benton Harbor residents to use bottled water for drinking, cooking, teeth brushing and mixing baby formula due to elevated levels of lead showing up in tap water testing.

“Protecting the health and safety of Benton Harbor residents is a top priority,” said Elizabeth Hertel, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) director. “We’ve listened to the community’s concerns and out of an abundance of caution, we are recommending that residents use bottled water for cooking, drinking and brushing teeth.”

The state issued the recommendation on Wednesday, Oct. 6 and said 15,500 cases of bottled water were being delivered to city distribution centers in the coming days.

The move represents an escalation in state response to concerns about lead entering tap water through old lead service lines in a city with significant exceedances of the 15 parts-per-billion (ppb) action level over the last three years.

Testing in 2018 began showing elevated lead results. One home tested at 440-ppb in 2020. Eleven homes have tested above 15-ppb this year, with one hitting 889-ppb — nearly 60 times the action level, which will drop to 12-ppb in Michigan in 2025.

Advocates have responded by pressing the city, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), DHHS and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's office for a stronger response.

In September, 20 environmental and public advocacy organizations filed a petition with the EPA asking for a federal intervention in the majority Black city of about 10,000 residents. The state began providing bottled water and going door-to-door to help install faucet filters and test the blood lead levels of children a couple weeks after the petition.

"They have to tell the people the water is unsafe to drink," said Rev. Edward Pinkney, a community faith leader and president of the grassroots Benton Harbor Community Water Council, in response to Wednesday's bottled water recommendation.

"This should have been declared a state of emergency," Pinkney said. "Until someone says the water is unsafe to drink, people are going to continue drinking it; destroying their kidneys, their livers and destroying our babies' brains."

"That should have been the first thing."

DHHS spokesperson Lynn Sutfin said the EPA is studying the effectiveness of filters and the state is taking "every precaution" in response to questions about an emergency declaration sent to EGLE, DHHS and Gov. Whitmer's office.

The bottled water recommendation is based on "a few homes having high lead levels in their water sample," Sutfin wrote.

"We are taking every precaution and leaning into this problem with all the tools that we have in concert with the city, local health department, Environmental Protection Agency, community groups and multiple state agencies," Sutfin wrote. "We will continue to monitor this situation and take any actions necessary to protect the residents of Benton Harbor. Bottled water will continue to be distributed to City of Benton Harbor residents through a local-state partnership as long as needed."

EPA Region 5 spokesperson Taylor Gillespie said the EPA has confidence in faucet filters in use, but is studying the specific water chemistry in Benton Harbor to confirm their efficacy.

"Certified filters that are properly installed and maintained are effective in reducing lead concentrations in drinking water, according to the most recent science available and studies conducted in Michigan and other parts of the country, including EPA's most recent review of available studies," she said.

In Benton Harbor's water system, about 51 percent of the 5,877 water service lines are "either are known to contain lead, are known to be galvanized lines previously connected to lead, or are of unknown material but likely to contain lead," according to the advocacy groups' petition. Only 2 percent of the city's service lines have been confirmed as lead-free.

The city water department was not using corrosion control as required by state and federal law in 2018 when tap water began testing for elevated lead levels, according to the petition. The city began using a polyphosphate blend in 2019 and the process has been under state study. Corrosion control is used to coat pipes and prevent lead from leaching into finished water. Benton Harbor draws its water from Lake Michigan.

Wednesday's bottled water recommendation was issued jointly by EGLE and DHHS "out of an abundance of caution" and is "part of an accelerated, across-the-board effort to reduce the risk of exposure to lead in drinking water while the city replaces all lead service lines," according to a news release.

The state says more than 4,500 cases of bottled water has been delivered to Benton Harbor through a local-state partnership and the incoming surge of bottles will include expanded delivery to ensure everyone has access to it.

Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad issued a statement Wednesday, saying, "cooperation, collaboration and coordination are the key ingredients moving forward to replace lead service lines and ensure that every resident is protected as we work to solve the water issues in Benton Harbor."

Bottled water will be available on Thursday, Oct. 7 from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency (CAA) at 331 Miller Street. It will continue on Friday, Oct. 8 from 2 to 6 p.m. at God's Household of Faith at 275 Pipestone Street.

More distribution dates and locations are planned. Residents who are unable to pick up water and/or require water delivery should call 800-815-5485 to schedule drop-offs.

"This acceleration is part of a longer-term effort to eliminate exceedances of the federal lead standard, educate the community on the effects of lead in drinking water, remove lead service lines and increase confidence in filtered water from the tap," the agencies stated.

The state's 2022 budget includes $10 million for replacement of lead service lines in Benton Harbor and $15 million for a new drinking water emergency fund.
According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no safe level of lead exposure for children. Exposure to high amounts of the toxic metal includes brain and nervous system damage, slowed growth and development, learning and behavior problems and hearing and speech problems. Exposure has also been tied to lower IQ and decreased attention span and performance among schoolchildren.

"Lead affects over a long term," Pinkney said. "It goes into the bones."

The Benton Harbor Water Council is holding a community townhall meeting on Saturday, Oct. 9 from 1-4 p.m. at 275 Pipestone Street. The meeting will feature experts from Flint and Detroit.

Cyndi Roper, a senior policy advocate with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in Michigan, echoed Pinkney's call for an emergency declaration on Wednesday.

"What they should have said is the 'water is unsafe to drink,'" she said. "That's the reality. We're really disappointed they didn't just come out and say that. It's a very different message to say 'out of an abundance of caution' versus being very clear with people that they've been drinking contaminated water for three years and need to switch to bottled water while officials and others figure out what's wrong."

Roper sees troubling parallels to early aspects of the Flint crisis response in the ongoing situation in Benton Harbor.

"The longer they wait to come out and be honest with the people of Benton Harbor, the harder it's going to be for them to regain the trust of the community," Roper said.

"It's baffling how we could be in this situation in Michigan in a majority Black community this soon after the Flint incident started," she said. "This is something none of us ever expected to happen again in Michigan."

https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2021/10/06/benton-harbor-urged-use-bottled-water-due-lead-risk/6026581001/

Benton Harbor urged to use bottled water due to lead risk
Leonard N. Fleming
The Detroit News

Correction: This story has been updated to reflect the state's recommended uses for bottled water.

Benton Harbor residents were strongly urged Wednesday by the state to drink and cook with bottled water as the state officials seek to fend off criticism that they hadn't done enough to respond to three straight years of elevated lead levels in the city.

The move by the state Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy came nearly a week after EGLE officials began to make bottled water available to residents in the southwest Michigan city under pressure from environmental and activist groups.

"We've listened to the community's concerns and out of an abundance of caution, we are recommending that residents use bottled water for cooking, drinking and brushing teeth," Michigan Health and Human Services Director Elizabeth Hertel said in a statement.

Bottled water should also be used for bottled water for rinsing foods and mixing powdered infant formula, officials said.

In recent sampling periods, lead levels have been even higher than in the initial lead exceedance in fall 2018, the first year of the violation to the state's stringent lead and copper rule. That year, eight

homes tested above 15 parts per billion and the highest was 60 ppb. In 2021, 11 homes tested above 15 ppb with the highest coming in at 889 ppb.

Benton Harbor becomes the second major Michigan city to move to bottled water at the urgency of the state. Flint endured a water crisis that briefly received national attention roughly five years ago after homes there showed excessive lead levels after its water wasn't properly treated with corrosion controls following a switch to corrosive Flint River water. At one point, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found lead levels as high as 13,000 parts per billion there.

For three straight years, Benton Harbor's water sampling for lead has exceeded state limits and the amounts of lead found in Flint before it became engulfed in its crisis in 2015. It is also longer than when Parchment, near Kalamazoo, had two consecutive years of excessive lead levels before its lead pipes were replaced in 2020.

Last month, the EPA received a scathing emergency petition from environmental groups lambasting EGLE and the city of Benton Harbor for failing to provide residents with safe drinking water such as bottled water after the three straight years of lead exceedances.

In addition to the water distribution, EGLE officials have agreed to better educate residents about how to use water filters after criticism that the process didn't inform them them on how to properly install the filters. The petition was filed in September by groups including the Great Lakes Environmental Law Center, the Benton Harbor Community Water Council and other organizations.

The decision by state officials "is a step in the right direction," said Cyndi Roper, the senior policy advocate for the National Resources Defense Council. But it should have come much earlier after many warnings about how unsafe the lead-tainted water has been, she said.

"The community groups have been asking for the state to come up with this type of response for years now," Roper said. "There's still a lot of details to that need to be worked out with the community. But again, we need to be sure that communities are listened to when they bring these issues forward and that we are believing them."

So far, state officials say they have delivered more than 4,500 cases of bottled water and filters through a local-state partnership. They expect another 15,500 cases to be distributed soon to the mostly low-income city of nearly 10,000 residents, most of whom are Black.

Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad said he's been working with the state and county officials to help "resolve the problem for the short, long term and immediate" and is "pleased to see them stepping in."

"In the immediate, there's a saying where a good firefighter would rather respond to 10 false calls and not respond and miss one," Muhammad said. "Every household is being treated as if lead is in the house. So that's why the alert came out to bottled water for certain things."

Benton Harbor resident George Dixon has mostly dodged the lead in the city's water system. He and his family have been buying water in bottles and jugs for years.

"I always drank bottled water," said Dixon, 33. "I always have, even before this crisis."

But it can be a struggle to get enough bottled water, which Dixon estimates costs his family $100 a month.

Since warnings of elevated lead levels in the city's water supply, other Benton Harbor residents have been taking on the same expense. Dixon is a barber and said his customers wish they had access to clean water.

"They spend money on bottled water," said Dixon, who talks about the water supply with customers who come visit him at KingsMen Cuts. "More money than they should have to."

Dixon said the city, state or federal government should make water and filters easier to find.

"Their focus should be more on the health and the concern of the kids," he said.

State officials said the EPA is conducting a filter effectiveness study to gather data and provide confidence in the effectiveness of water filters to reduce lead in drinking water. The free bottled water will be provided as long as needed, they said. Further information on the completion date of the study will be shared by EPA when available.

The state last month said it would go door-to-door to distribute filters and show people how to install them. But in its latest statement, the state officials said the federal government is studying how effective the filters are in reducing lead in drinking water.

Meanwhile, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer last month announced a plan to remove the estimated 2,400 or more lead pipes in Benton Harbor within five years. Environmental groups and others said it can be done faster. EGLE said that lead pipes are a major reason for lead in the water but environmental groups said corrosion control has failed as well.

In the $70 billion budget that Whitmer recently signed into law, $10 million was earmarked for use in replacing lead service lines in Benton Harbor. It was a reduction from the $20 million that the governor initially sought.

Another $15 million would be added to a fund to help the state address drinking water emergencies.

Benton Harbor water distribution

When: 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday

Where: Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency, 331 Miller

When: 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Friday

Where: God's Household of Faith, 275 Pipestone

Additional dates and locations for bottled water pick-up will be posted at Michigan.gov/MiLeadSafe.

Residents who are unable to pick up water or require water delivery can call 800-815-5485 to schedule drop-offs.