Message

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Subject: USS Lead - Press

East Chicago press clips
US EPA Region 5 – prepared by the Office of Public Affairs
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http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/naacp-to-host-east-chicago-environmental-justice-panel-discussion/article_2e152e3a-03d8-51b9-a608-ea841390c76d.html

NAACP to host East Chicago environmental justice panel discussion

- Lauren Cross, Northwest Indiana Times Apr 2, 2017

EAST CHICAGO — NAACP and Twin City Ministerial Alliance leaders will host a community listening session Wednesday to discuss a series of topics related to the city's lead crisis.
Among the topics up for discussion will be East Chicago's status as an environmental justice community, as well as lessons learned from Flint, Michigan's water crisis.
East Chicago is considered an environmental justice community because many of its residents are low-income people of color and the city is home to several polluters and industry, said Denise Abdul-Rahman, state director of the NAACP Climate and Environmental Justice Program.
"East Chicago more than exemplifies this definition," Abdul-Rahman said. "This crisis is truly an environmental injustice and we seek to obtain environmental justice."
Abdul-Rahman said a panel discussion will begin at 5:45 p.m. at First Baptist Church, 4911 McCook Ave., in East Chicago. Each panel participant will quickly introduce themselves, but individuals will, for the most part, be on hand to answer audience questions, she said.
"The main goal is to provide a platform for the community to air concerns. Whatever concerns that are lingering. There's the displacement of residents (in West Calumet), concerns about home buyouts, health issues, declining property values," Abdul-Rahman said.

Panel experts include Jacqueline Patterson, director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program; Katherine Egland, Environmental & Climate Justice committee chair for the NAACP National Board of Directors; Pamela Pugh, environmental, health and education chair for NAACP in Flint, Michigan, and chief public health officer for the city of Flint; Douglas Ballotti, acting division director for the Superfund division for EPA Region 5; John Hall, field director of

the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Region 5; and Richard Hites, executive director for the Indiana Civil Rights Commission

The NAACP plans to partner with local organizations to provide water filters. The East Chicago Health Department will be on hand to provide lead testing, while EPA will provide information on water filter installation.

Last year, the NAACP connected with local Strack & Van Til and Whole Foods stores to deliver fresh fruits and vegetables to two churches in the Superfund site. The NAACP also visited with the West Calumet community last summer, visited the East Chicago City Council, and met with ministers and a number of other local, state and federal groups, according to the news release. The NAACP was also among the number of community groups to sign a petition, urging for lead pipe replacement and water filters for residents.

Before the panel discussion, Janet Pope, a community outreach coordinator with the EPA, will lead a 2:15 p.m. tour of the Superfund site, Abdul-Rahman said.

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/epa-urges-east-chicago-to-determine-west-calumet-s-future/article_2250b8ed-16d7-5701-9922-002cbe329a54.html

EPA urges East Chicago to determine West Calumet's future use

Northwest Indiana Times, Lauren Cross April 1, 2017

EAST CHICAGO — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is calling on Mayor Anthony Copeland to disclose anticipated future land use of the soon-to-be-demolished West Calumet Housing Complex, saying "a prompt decision on this issue is in the best interests of the city and its residents."

For several months, residents and community groups have requested details from Copeland about his plans for the lead- and arsenic-contaminated complex, which is located within the EPA's USS Lead Superfund site.

"We need to know what the use of the property will be put to, and design the remedy on that, whether it's commercial or residential. There's a big difference if the entire site is going to be paved in concrete, be a playground, (or residential)," Robert Kaplan, acting regional administration for EPA Region 5, told The Times Thursday.

Prompted by questions from The Times, Copeland issued a general statement Friday, saying the city "will make public our solution once we have an approved plan."

"The residents of East Chicago should know that abandoning the West Calumet property and leaving it an open field is not one of those options. The redevelopment process of a (Superfund site) is a process that takes time, research, and numerous discussions with community residents, faith-based organizations and community-based organizations," he said.

Selecting a cleanup plan

As is the case with most EPA Superfund sites across the U.S., families at West Calumet would have been allowed to stay during excavation under a cleanup plan selected by the EPA in 2012.

But those plans were shelved last summer after the East Chicago Housing Authority and Copeland announced they instead wanted to relocate the 1,000 residents and demolish the 346-unit complex following the EPA's discovery of dangerously high levels of lead in the soil. A few dozen families remain at West Calumet, but housing officials hope to have the entire complex vacated by Friday.

Ongoing EPA cleanup efforts are underway in two nearby contaminated neighborhoods in the Superfund site, where hundreds of families were not ordered to leave.

The city and housing complex's decision to demolish "necessitates changing key provisions and assumptions in the selected remedy," Kaplan wrote in a March 22 message to Copeland.

Kaplan said the EPA first requested input in August.

"With this letter, I am renewing that request," Kaplan wrote.

Copeland said city and housing officials have focused efforts on relocating the dozens of remaining families from the site "during this trying time" with a move-out deadline next week.

"Our plan, which will have considerable public input before moving forward, will focus on bolstering our community and economic development efforts," he said in the statement.

Future site uncertainty

The Times requested from Copeland a general timeline for demolition, and more information about funding sources and total costs for demolition. No answers were provided. It's unclear if the city has secured all dollars required to tear down the complex.

Due to the uncertainty of the future site use, EPA's Kaplan said the agency is proceeding with a feasibility study that evaluates cleanup alternatives and estimated costs for various future-use scenarios. EPA cannot, however, select a new remediation plan without first knowing the city and ECHA's intended future use, Kaplan said in the letter.
As of Friday, the EPA said the agency has not yet received a response from the city, though Copeland said his administration "is in talks" with the EPA about remediation options.
The East Chicago/Calumet Coalition Community Advisory Group sent a letter to Copeland on March 22 requesting any current or redevelopment plans and information about the planning process for redevelopment for the entire Superfund site.
The group also requested the names of investors, stakeholders and other agencies involved in any redevelopment plan meetings and any plans to potentially use eminent domain powers to acquire properties on the USS Lead site. They had not received a response as of Friday.
The neighborhoods within the USS Lead Superfund site are among the most densely populated areas in East Chicago, and about 20 percent of the city's land is residential while the rest is mostly industrial, according to EPA documents.
Relocation rare under Superfund
EPA's Kaplan maintained in his letter to Copeland that the 2012 remedy "would have proceeded last summer in a safe manner, protective of residents ... As we discussed, EPA has many years of experience in cleaning up similar lead contaminated soil in residents areas in a safe and efficient manner."
The EPA has said it's uncommon for the agency to evacuate Superfund sites, noting how numerous protective measures are put in place to prevent the spread of airborne toxins.
"Our strong preference, as an agency, and there's guidance for this, we want to leave people in place (and) not split up neighborhoods. We want to minimize dislocation and keep people safe in homes," Kaplan told The Times.
The state's housing agency — the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority — recently agreed to contribute $2.08 million for the security and demolition of West Calumet, though that will not cover all costs.
The money will be provided to the Managed East Chicago Housing Authority, the nonprofit development arm of ECHA.
The state agency projects that demolition will be completed by Sept. 28.
An attorney for the East Chicago Housing Authority declined comment Friday about ECHA's involvement in redevelopment plans, saying the local authority's efforts are now focused on relocation efforts of families.

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/idem-to-install-water-filters-for-east-chicago-superfund-households/article_4c084af6-0c9e-55b3-9a1b-d6314ae5404c.html

IDEM to install water filters for East Chicago Superfund households in April

- Times Staff (Northwest Indiana Times) Apr 1, 2017 Updated Apr 1, 2017

EAST CHICAGO — The Indiana Department of Environmental Management on April 10 will begin installing water filters for households in the USS Lead Superfund site, where the federal Environmental Protection Agency late last year discovered elevated lead levels in drinking water.
The state department is partnering with North American Aqua, a Vandalia, Michigan-based water filtration company, to install the filters and provide families in zones 2 and 3 of the site two additional filter cartridges, IDEM said.
Work is expected to be completed no later than April 30, according to IDEM.
It was first reported in December the EPA found lead levels exceeding its standard for drinking water in a batch of homes in the Superfund site due to inadequate corrosion control chemicals.
IDEM said Friday the city has been in compliance with EPA's Lead and Copper Rule since 1993. Filters are being installed "out of an abundance of caution," and will protect residents from construction-related risks as EPA resumes soil excavation work in zones 2 and 3 in early May, IDEM said.
Remediation activities can disturb lead water lines, IDEM said, noting there "is a chance that small particles of lead can break off and get into the water."
EPA's testing was initially carried out to see if the EPA's construction work would disturb service lines, causing lead to become dislodged and enter the water supply. However, water testing data showed elevated lead levels prior to the EPA's excavation work.
The EPA has also recommended all water customers citywide use filters, noting the results from the agency's pilot study should be considered a representative sample of the rest of the city.

Up to 90 percent of an estimated 11,000 water service connections in East Chicago could be lead, which can leach into drinking water. Because of this, residents should assume they have lead lines and use a properly certified filter, EPA said. IDEM is currently working with East Chicago to conduct further testing to ensure the city is in compliance with the Lead and Copper Rule.

Flint, Michigan, also was in compliance with the Lead and Copper Rule before outrage over elevated lead levels gained national attention.
EPA has said it is considering revisions to the rule.
Gov. Eric Holcomb last month extended his emergency disaster declaration in East Chicago another 30 days.
On Friday, he said the state will continue to work closely with federal and local partners on a number of fronts, including the ultimate goal of replacing water lines in the zones 2 and 3 of the USS Lead Superfund site.

http://wboi.org/post/epa-answers-questions-east-chicago-residents-remediation#stream/0
EPA Answers Questions From East Chicago Residents On Remediation
Lauren Chapman

Environmental Protection Agency representatives fielded questions over the weekend about clean-up of a lead-contaminated Superfund site in East Chicago, Indiana.
Most of the questions centered around identifying contractors, the timeline of work, and details of what remediation entails. On March 21, the EPA announced a new settlement to pay for clean-up efforts in Zones 2 and 3 of the Superfund.
But some, like Maria Watson, questioned the efficiency of clean-up efforts and the EPA's commitment to residents in the Superfund.
"I mean really, are we ever going to be lead free?" Watson says.
Maritza Lopez, the community organizer who organized the meeting, says the back-and-forth between EPA representatives and residents was important.
"Having answers and being able to ask them questions, that alleviates a lot of the stress," Lopez says. "Even though, if they say, I can't answer that, at least just having them physically there... that helps give some resolve on that portion."
Lopez says her group plans to work with the EPA to get more specific answers for residents as clean-up starts again on April 17.
http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/1245/split_display.adp?fedfid=108288880&vname=dennotallissues&fn=108288880&jd=108288880
EPA Will Respond to East Chicago Lead Crisis: Regional Official

Snapshot
• The EPA will likely accept a petition to provide bottled water and filters to residents of East Chicago, Ind.
• The city is struggling with lead contamination

By Tiffany Stecker BNA
The EPA will soon grant an emergency petition to launch a federal response addressing widespread lead contamination in East Chicago, Ind., the Midwest's top regional official for the agency said March 30.
"I think there's going to be good news on that front," Robert Kaplan, acting Environmental Protection Agency Region 5 administrator, told Bloomberg BNA at the sidelines of a panel at the American Bar Association's Section of Environment, Energy and Resources spring conference in Los Angeles, adding that the agency is "carefully considering" the petition.
An alliance of environmental nonprofits led by the Natural Resources Defense Council filed the petition March 2 in response to a Reuters investigation finding widespread lead contamination in the city's drinking water. More than 40 percent of homes surrounding East Chicago's Superfund site had elevated levels of lead in their drinking water, according to an EPA pilot study last fall.
The petition asks the EPA to provide, or order the city and/or state to provide, residents with water filters or bottled water until the city's drinking water is safe to drink. It also requests an expansion of blood testing for lead for children under the age of seven.
Kaplan also called on his agency to quickly implement revisions to the 1991 Lead and Copper Rule, which dictates how water utilities must test for lead and notify communities with contaminated water.

Public health advocates have criticized the rule, saying it allows utilities to circumvent testing requirements, as was done in Flint, Mich., in 2015. The rule gives residents a false sense of security, Kaplan said on the panel. The EPA is planning to rewrite the rule this year.

http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/news/ct-ptb-east-chicago-epa-cag-st-0402-20170401-story.html

As EPA readies cleanup in East Chicago, residents remain concerned about lead, arsenic

Craig Lyons Post-Tribune

As the Environmental Protection Agency is poised to restart remediation in the neighborhoods at East Chicago's U.S.S. Lead Superfund site, residents remain concerned the cleanup is not effective.

EPA officials Saturday gave residents a better picture of the scale of remediation work set to start at the end of April, but many of those who live at the Superfund site continued to press for answers about whether the cleanup will make the neighborhoods safe in the future.

Resident Tara Adams said hearing about properties that haven't been sampled for contamination and others that continue to have high levels of lead and arsenic in the soil despite prior remediation is concerning.

"Are we ever going to be lead free?" Adams said.

Dan Haag, an on-scene coordinator with EPA, said it's a work in progress and the EPA is still working to get access to properties to test and get them cleaned up.

Resident Sherry Adams said she's not heard if the ground at her apartment building is contaminated.

"As residents of that complex, we need to know," Sherry Adams said.

More than 90 properties haven't been sampled for lead or arsenic, Haag said, and until the property owner has given permission, work can't get done there.

"We haven't given up and we're still trying to get access to those 90 plus properties," Haag said.

The clean-up work will be bolstered by an additional $16 million the EPA secured from the parties responsible for the contamination at the site, which will primarily be for work needed in the neighborhood between Kennedy Avenue and McCook Avenue. That money is in addition to the $26 million the EPA secured for clean up in 2014.

The EPA expects to remediate the soil around 120 homes in Zone 3, which runs east of Huish Drive, and 72 homes in Zone 2, which is west of Kennedy Avenue, during the 2017 construction season. The properties targeted for cleanup have high concentrations of lead and arsenic in the soil, according to the EPA.

Resident Jim Ventura said several people who previously had remediation done at their properties continue to have high levels of lead and arsenic in the soil.

Haag said the EPA uses top soil and backfill that's been tested for any contamination and is considered clean before it's used to replace any dirt removed during remediation.

Resident Ray Mosley said his yard has had soil dug up but he got a letter last year stating he's still has high levels of arsenic in the ground around his house.

Resident Carlyle Edwards said the EPA is only going two feet down at the most, which doesn't mean all the contaminated soil is being removed. Plus, he said, if the groundwater is contaminated, lead and arsenic will continue to get back into the soil.

Kristina Behnke, an EPA on-scene coordinator, said once remediation is done, the EPA will continue to check every five years to see if any recontamination has occurred.

As the 2016 construction season wrapped up, EPA officials had remediated soil at 17 homes in Zone 2 of the site, which runs from McCook Avenue to East Huish Drive, and 38 in Zone 3, which runs from East Huish Drive to Parrish Avenue.

In Zone 2, the EPA sampled soil from 494 of 596 homes, according to the federal agency, and 419 of 480 homes in Zone 3.

EPA officials anticipated that at least 395 homes in Zone 2 and 212 in Zone 3 still need remediation, according to documents filed in federal court.

Indoor dust sampling was done at residences in both zones 2 and 3, according to the EPA, and if levels of lead were above those considered safe, cleaning was offered to those residents. The EPA will continue to sample dust in homes when excavation restarts in the spring.

http://chicago.suntimes.com/opinion/because-of-epa-chicago-is-cleaner-and-safer-lets-not-go-back/

Because of EPA, Chicago is cleaner and safer — let's not go back

Chicago Sun Times Editorial, April 2, 2017

Chicagoans today, compared to our grandparents' generation, can breathe a lot more easily because of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
Our air is clearer. Our water cleaner. Our children healthier.
The battle over the EPA's budget may be waging far away in Washington, but many of the agency's big success stories can be found right here in the Chicago area. To go back now on that commitment to a cleaner environment would be foolish. To return to the days of ozone alerts and children eating peeled lead paint would be unconscionable.
In Washington, President Donald Trump wants to cut the EPA budget by 31 percent, hobbling an agency we rely on every day, even if we don't know it. A fifth of the agency's positions would be eliminated, and Trump wants to slash scientific research.
That would matter plenty to Chicago, a city on the precious Great Lakes that has moved on — but is still cleaning up — from a heavily polluted industrial past. A city that likes its fancy new Riverwalk, which would be folly if the Chicago River were still the open sewer it once was.
Reminders of why Chicago should support a fully functioning EPA are all around us.

- Municipal sewage treatment plants throughout the region have been updated to EPA standards, making water cleaner. The EPA also took a lead role in ensuring that wastewater from sewage treatment plants is disinfected before it is discharged into Chicago area waterways.
- The EPA has coordinated a multiyear effort to keep invasive Asian carp out of the Great Lakes. The EPA also plays a role in preventing new invasive species from being dumped into the lakes from the ballast water of oceangoing ships.
- When the operators of BP's oil refinery in Whiting, Indiana, wanted send more toxic pollution into the air, that was OK with the State of Indiana. But the EPA stopped it. In 2007, when the refinery got a permit to dump 54 percent more ammonia and 35 percent more suspended solids into Lake Michigan each year, the EPA stopped that, too.
- Dangerous heavy metals from an H. Kramer and Co. smelter that got into residential yards in Pilsen will be cleaned up because of an EPA investigation. The EPA also cleaned up the site of the former Loewenthal Metals in Pilsen.
- The EPA provides funding for beach monitoring, so we all know when it is safe to swim.
- The EPA did a study showing mountains of petcoke stored on the South Side were causing chronic health problems. Only the EPA has the authority to install the monitors that measure the petcoke on surrounding neighborhoods.
- The EPA played a major role in detecting lead in the municipal water supply of Flint, Michigan – work that led to a program to get lead out of drinking water in Chicago's schools.
- The EPA won a court fight in 1977 to reduce the amount of industrial waste getting into Lake Michigan and the Grand Calumet River from U.S. Steel's Gary Works.
- The EPA runs the Great Lakes National Program Office, which plans for the protection and restoration of the lakes for years to come.
- With the Army Corps of Engineers, the EPA is paying to dredging and remove toxic sediments in the heavily polluted Grand Calumet River in Indiana. If not removed, those pollutants eventually will move into the lake.
- It was the EPA that found that residents of East Chicago, Indiana, had lead in their drinking water. The EPA put 30 people on the ground to investigation environmental contamination from the former USS Lead site in East Chicago.

The U.S. EPA's budget already has been squeezed in recent years. If its budget now is decimated, that will hobble the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, too. The IEPA gets a fifth of its funding from the U.S. EPA.
Our city, region and state cannot afford such cuts. Too much work remains undone throughout the region.
As Joel Brammeier, president of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, put it: "Everybody has a basic belief they will have clean air and water without having to wake up in the morning wondering if that is going to happen."
The proposed cuts to the EPA are huge. If they go through, you can bet Chicago will be wondering what might happen again.

http://wbaa.org/post/east-chicago-puts-involuntary-moves-hold-while-residents-appeal#stream/0
East Chicago Puts Involuntary Moves On Hold While Residents Appeal
Annie Ropeik Mar 31, 2017 WBAA NPR

March 31 was supposed to be the deadline for families in a lead-contaminated public housing complex in East Chicago, Indiana to move out, or be sent to temporary housing. But some are still appealing those assignments – and they won't be forced out until their complaints are settled.
Hearings for residents who filed grievances about their temporary housing assignments will be held Monday April 3 and Tuesday April 4.
Federal officials say families in West Calumet Housing Complex who aren't satisfied with their temporary housing assignments won't have to move until after hearings with housing authority officials.
But residents' attorney Emily Coffey says the threat of the deadline still took a toll. She says some residents were forced to settle for less-than-ideal circumstances.
"Residents are having to make a choice between some pretty difficult things. Some are choosing to move in with relatives or friends rather than take the unit ECHA has offered them," Coffey says.
ECHA is the East Chicago Housing Authority. It's offered residents units in town, in Gary, and on the Southside of Chicago. And tenant Keeshea Daniels is facing that choice – between moving in with her grandmother, or to Chicago. She says she understands why most of her neighbors are already gone.
"Cause they didn't want to be forced out, and I'm sure a lot of us don't want that. Because who wants somebody coming in, sitting their stuff outside – I don't think nobody wants that," Daniels says.
By Monday, Daniels says she'll know if she has to move in with her grandmother or a potential home in Zone 3.
"Hopefully everything works out so I can rest – I just want to be able to go to sleep and rest," Daniels says. "It's just this situation with the eviction or 'forced move,' I haven't been able to rest. And it would just be so nice to be in a nice house where you can rest. And I'm not able to do that right now."
As of March 30, HUD reported 287 of the original 332 families in the complex had moved or secured new housing. HUD expects all families will have moved by Friday, April 7.
Indiana Public Broadcasting's Lauren Chapman contributed reporting from East Chicago, Indiana.
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/us/west-calumet-housing-complex-lead-indiana.html

Deadline Up, Families Remain in Lead-Contaminated Housing in Indiana
New York Times (AP) April 1, 2017

INDIANAPOLIS — Dozens of families remained at a lead-contaminated public housing complex in northwest Indiana despite a Friday target date to move them out so the city could tear down the buildings.
More than 270 families have left the housing development, West Calumet Housing Complex in East Chicago, and officials hope to have the remaining 50 or so families out within a week. But the delay points to several problems with the evacuation effort, like limited rental options in the formerly industrial area, landlords who will not accept government housing vouchers and some residents' resistance to being forced from the city.
Tara Adams, who lives in West Calumet and is a lifelong resident of East Chicago, said she has been seeking a new home for herself, her 19-year-old son and her 11-year-old daughter since last summer and has had their belongings packed for months. The temporary housing she has been offered is about 25 miles away, in what she worries is a perilous neighborhood across the state line on Chicago's South Side.
"I for sure don't want to move my 19-year-old son into an area where there's a greater chance for him to get shot," Ms. Adams said. "I don't want to do that."
Officials began clearing out the 45-year-old complex of three-story apartment buildings last summer after detailed soil testing found some yards with lead levels more than 70 times the federal safety standard.
The Environmental Protection Agency soon warned parents to keep their children away from the dirt on the site, which was occupied decades ago by a lead-products factory. Just to the south sat the sprawling United States Smelter and Lead Refinery, or U.S.S. Lead, which salvaged lead from old car batteries and scrap metal before it closed in 1985.
The complex was home to more than 1,000 people, including about 700 children. Tests by the Indiana Department of Health found high lead levels in blood samples from some children. Even at low levels, lead exposure can damage nervous systems and lower I.Q.s, according to experts.
The Department of Housing and Urban Development reached an agreement in November with advocates representing the residents that gave families a break on rent and until the end of March to find new homes.

Of those families remaining at the complex, homes in East Chicago have been arranged for about 30, and fewer than 10 families face possible relocations to Chicago, according to HUD officials. Those unhappy with their relocation options have until Monday to file grievances with the local housing authority.
James Cunningham, HUD's deputy regional administrator in Chicago, said the limited number of rentals available in East Chicago had complicated efforts to find new homes nearby for all the West Calumet residents.
"The absorption, I think, has gone pretty well given the large number — we had to relocate 332 families," Mr. Cunningham said.
Final decisions on the relocations rest with city officials, who did not talk with a couple dozen protesters at City Hall last week calling for an extension of the relocation deadline.
Mayor Anthony Copeland said in a statement to news media that he would never advocate moving residents involuntarily "unless we faced an issue of public safety" and that waiting wasn't an option because of the environmental hazards.
The plans to move some families across the state line into Illinois could cost people jobs and state Medicaid coverage and force children to change schools late in the school year, said Emily Coffey, a lawyer for the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, which is based in Chicago.
Ms. Coffey said that the relocation agreement from November was meant to maximize the choice residents had in finding new homes and that local housing officials were making "panicked moves" after letting families live at the polluted complex for decades.
"If there are emergency relocations, it's going to be pretty unlikely that those families are going to be able to move to healthy communities where they'll have access to good education, good health care and good jobs," she said.
Ms. Adams still has a sign from the E.P.A. warning against playing in the dirt in the front yard of what has been her family's home for nine years. She said it's "by the grace of God" that blood tests have not found high lead levels in her children.
But she said she has been looking constantly for a new home in hopes of keeping her daughter in a school she likes and a community her family knows.
"What's very frustrating is people making it seem like we're not looking, or we're not searching, or we're just doing nothing," Ms. Adams said. "I've never wanted to be in this situation, so since day one I've been trying to find somewhere to live."
A version of this article appears in print on April 2, 2017, on Page A19 of the New York edition with the headline: Dozens of Indiana Families Remain Housed in Complex That Is Tainted by Lead. Order Reprints Today's PaperSubscribe

http://indianapublicmedia.org/news/researchers-aim-test-portable-bone-lead-scanner-east-chicago-117142/
Researchers Aim To Test Portable Bone Lead Scanner In East Chicago
By Sarah Fentem Indiana Public Media Posted March 31, 2017
Bone lead X-ray tests are more effective than other methods, but only three machines in the country can perform them – including one at Purdue University.

East Chicago's Calumet neighborhood is an Environmental Protection Agency Superfund site.
East Chicago residents affected by long-term lead exposure from now-shuttered refineries are hoping a new portable lead testing device will give them answers that have so far proved elusive.
Scientists, including a Purdue University professor, are in the process of testing an X-ray gun that measures the amount of lead in people's bones – and they hope to take that test to East Chicago.
Bone lead X-ray tests are rare, since there are only three machines in the country that perform them – including at Linda Nie's lab in West Lafayette.
They're called X-ray fluorescence, or XRF, machines. Nie says they're more effective than most lead tests, which measure the amount of lead in blood or urine – and thus show only short-term exposure.
"The half life of lead in bone is up to decades," she says, "which means, then, bone lead would reflect cumulative exposure."
Nie and colleagues at Harvard and Boston Universities are working to prove a portable XRF gun is just as effective as Nie's stationary lead testing machine. They've tested people with the portable device, but so far participants have only shown very small lead amounts in their bones.
Testing people in East Chicago, Nie says, would determine the device's effectiveness in people with higher degrees of lead exposure – and help residents receive a rare, valuable test.

Nie and her colleagues will travel to East Chicago this weekend to seek out potential study participants. She says they plan to "talk to [residents] a little bit about the study we're doing and also explain to them about the devices and, yes, hopefully to recruit some people."
Maritza Lopez is hoping to be one of those recruits. She's lived inside East Chicago's USS Lead Superfund site for more than 50 years, with health problems including hemorrhages, lost teeth.
"I've been having that order [for an XRF test] from my doctors since January," Lopez says. "Nobody does it."
Lopez says just knowing if her health problems are related to lead exposure would offer some relief.
"I'm praying that I can get it done," she says, "because in my spirit, I know... I know."
This weekend's meeting about testing is only a first step – participants would need to be approved by a review board before they could take part.

http://www.indianapolisrecorder.com/news/article_993c77ca-0fd6-11e7-8ec3-f74f3f4ab4d3.html
Black leaders raising voices on environmental justice

Indianapolis Recorder By EBONY CHAPPEL, Posted: Thursday, March 23, 2017 10:40 am

On Friday, March 31, the IU McKinney School of Law, in collaboration with the state chapter of the NAACP, the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus and other groups, will host the Protecting the Urban Environment Symposium. This event, which is free and open to the public, will begin at 8:15 a.m.
Event organizer Dr. Carlton Waterhouse said the event has been held annually at the school for nearly a decade, but this year's focus on urban environments was an intentional choice based on current issues surrounding places like Flint, East Chicago and Indianapolis.
Topics of discussion will include lead contamination, access to clean drinking water and the steps involved in getting assistance from state agencies.
"The environmental conversation is one that needs to be at the top of list for the African-American community, because they have a disproportionate exposure to pollution all over the country. Their failure to pay attention to it means they are on the menu as opposed to at the table," said Waterhouse, who serves as director of the Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law Environmental, Energy and Natural Resources Law program. "They will still be affected by it and be exposed to it, but they will not be aware. It also means that they won't be involved in the decision-making that could resolve what these problems are."
Jaqueline Patterson, the national Director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, said it was important for them to be involved in this awareness effort given the fact that in Black communities, environmental hazards from coal fire power plants, incinerators and the presence of lead or cement result in clusters of the population becoming infected with cancer and respiratory illnesses. Other consequences include losses in property values and intellectual barriers for those in school, as exposure to pollution can impair one's cognitive ability.
"We see it as intersectional with our civil rights agenda," Patterson said.
The event will feature four panel discussions throughout the day, one of which is titled "The Legacy of Lead in Indiana — East Chicago and Beyond." Last month, Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb declared a state of emergency in East Chicago, a disaster declaration that former Gov. Mike Pence failed to approve. The emergency status, which was initially for 30 days, has been extended to allow more time for state and federal agencies to work together on solutions. Additionally, residents of the West Calumet housing projects, which are slated to be demolished, are still in the process of relocating, many of them seeking to leave at the end of the school year in late May.
Last week, however, Indiana Attorney General Curtis Hill joined 16 other state attorneys general and two governors in calling for an end to what they describe as "unlawful federal overreach" by the Environmental Protection Agency in a letter to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. In the correspondence, Hill stated that in Indiana, federal agencies have far too much power to interfere in Hoosiers' lives. "As attorney general, I work daily to make sure our state complies with federal law while at the same time protecting state prerogatives from the overreach of the federal government. I am eager to work with my fellow state attorneys general who share my concerns," he went on to say.
Activists like Denise Abdul-Rahman, the NAACP's state Environmental Climate Justice Chair, and Waterhouse both shared that they felt the statement was in poor taste, particularly given the state's current issues.
"I'm very disheartened that our African-American attorney general is supporting policies that are not going to be beneficial to the most vulnerable communities," said Abdul-Rahman.

Waterhouse, a former EPA attorney, sees the attorney general's request as an attempt to create a scenario in which there is little regulation or penalty if something goes wrong.
"(EPA attorneys) aren't influenced by the size of the company they're investigating or who their friends are. They make choices based on what's best for the environment. However, when state agencies are involved, they don't have the same level of distance, so a very powerful company is able to influence the local leadership of the state, and that impacts the significance of the enforcement actions that they take against those states," he said.
"The reason people don't want the EPA involved is it allows the economic players in the state to have lower fines and less significant enforcement actions against them when they violate the rules. The rules are there for the protection of the people. The decision to have a less protective environment is a decision to have fewer people involved in keeping it safe and keeping it clean. I don't see how members of the state could think it's a good idea to have fewer people help keep them safe and healthy."
Despite these potential barriers, community members involved in this fight soldier on.
"We helped to sign on to a petition with other national organizations because it has been found now that their water has been impacted by lead. They've had lead smelters and arsenic and the children's blood levels were seven times what the CDC's reference level is," said Abdul-Rahman. "From an Indianapolis perspective, these are lessons we need to heed, because we have the community of Martindale-Brightwood that has hosted lead for several years."
Abdul-Rahman, who has been closely involved with initiatives in both East Chicago and Indianapolis, shared that in East Chicago, residents are asking for a complete repair to the lead piping infrastructure as well as tax exemptions for their homes. "They are still paying property taxes on places that are worthless," she said. "Some are asking to even be bought out."
Recently, the NAACP and other organizations have begun collecting water bottles, filters and other supplies.
On April 5, they will host a listening session and crisis tour featuring Patterson with the Twin City Ministerial Alliance.
The plan is to also distribute water filters at this time.

Sincerely,

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