

## **City Council Budget Meeting - December 13, 2023**

### **Submission by Casey Peart and Patricia Elliott, Get The Lead Out Committee Re. Ensuring safe drinking water for Regina children**

Thank you for hearing our presentation. The Get The Lead Out Committee is a coalition of residents and community associations representing neighbourhoods where drinking water has become contaminated by deteriorating lead service connections owned by the City of Regina.

You will no doubt have read news reports in the past few weeks of the Biden administration's push to remove all lead service connections in the U.S., and the declaration of a state of emergency in the Virgin Islands after lead was detected in the drinking water.

This action comes on the heels of multiple large-scale peer-reviewed studies that have conclusively shown lead exposure places a heavy burden on the individual – in terms of permanent health damage and shortened life spans – and on society at large, with a global economic burden estimated at \$US 6 trillion annually, or 6.9 percent of the global gross domestic product.

It also comes on the heels of successful citizens' class action lawsuits against municipal governments that have failed to adhere to national standards created to protect citizens from harmful lead levels in their water.

Of particular concern, lead is a neurotoxin that slows brain growth in children. Children exposed to lead in the first five years of life lose an average of six 1Q points, according to a study published in The Lancet in September.

Health Canada states there is no safe level of lead consumption. A child exposed to lead in drinking water finds it harder to learn and behave appropriately in school. As an adult, they are more likely to face reduced employability, higher risk of addictions, and increased likelihood of coming into conflict with the law.

In a recent New York Times article, high school teacher Yvette Jordan described the impacts of lead in Newark, NJ's drinking water, saying, "Forty per cent of our students are special needs. All of these effects we see in our classroom every single day."

After tap water tests revealed lead levels at 20 to 27 micrograms/litre (or ppb), the City of Newark vowed to remove its 18,000 lead lines within 24 to 30 months at no cost to residents. In comparison, Regina has seen multiple results exceeding 100 and even 200 mcg/litre, yet is taking 15 years to remove 3,000 lines, with minimal assistance to residents.

Newark accomplished their goals by securing debt financing and availing itself of state-level opportunities, actions Regina seems willing to do for sports and entertainment facilities but not for timely LSC removals.

In the same article, Mona Hanna-Attisha, the pediatrician whose research exposed Flint's water crisis, said, "We have failed generations of children by not eliminating lead. When you have a poison that has no safe levels at all in our drinking water, it makes it impossible to make sure that the future of our nation is successful."

We see the rising levels of addictions, houselessness, and ill health in our neighbourhoods. It deeply concerns us that the future of Regina does not look successful, and that lead exposure is part of this picture.

We are asking you to, at the very least, ensure children whose homes are on lead service connections have the highest available level of protection. In the absence of removal of the LSCs, and with many questions surrounding the efficacy of filters, this means free replacement water delivery.

To this end, we propose the following options:

**Option A:** *Free bottled drinking water delivered to every Regina household with a City-owned lead service connection and children under the age of 14.*

There are currently 2,800 Regina homes on City-owned lead service connections, of which we can roughly estimate 12 percent have children under the age of 14, according to population profiles of the affected neighbourhoods.

**Estimated Cost:**

Water dispensers: \$100,800 one-time

Water delivery: \$294,336 in the first year, reducing annually as LSCs are removed

**Based on:**

An upper estimate of 336 households (12% of LSC addresses) consuming 730 gallons/year for a family of four (Canadian average)

Price per gallon: \$1.20 (\$6 per 5-gallon jug) = \$876/family annually

Dispensers: \$300 per unit (purchase price)

**OPTION B:** *Include private-side LSC homes with children.*

The City estimates 7,000 to 8,000 private side LSCs, potentially raising the number of impacted children to 960 (assuming a degree of overlap with city-owned LSCs). Given the high social costs, this population could also be considered for intervention and assistance.

**Estimated Total Cost:**

Water dispensers: \$288,000 one-time

Water delivery: \$841,960 in the first year, reducing annually as LSCs are removed

*Note:* this option could be accompanied by a commitment to remove the private line within a set deadline, with full assistance for removal offered to low income families.

**OPTION C:** *Bottled drinking water delivery to every exposed household on a City-owned LSC (2,800 addresses)*

**Total Cost:**

Water dispensers: \$840,000 one-time

Water delivery: \$2.5 million in the first year, reducing annually as LSCs are removed

**OPTION D:** *Bottled drinking water delivery to every exposed household on a City-owned LSC plus private-side homes that have children.*

**Total Cost:**

Water dispensers: \$1.1 million one-time

Water delivery: \$3.3 million in the first year, reducing annually as LSCs are removed

**Benefits**

All of these options represent a fraction of the price of inaction. The lead poisoning of Michigan children was calculated to have cost the state at least \$270 million per year, including \$78 million in increased juvenile and adult crime, \$18.3 million in increased healthcare costs, \$2.5 million for increased special education, and an estimated \$170.9 million in loss of lifetime earnings. Note that their lead levels were comparable to Regina's, but present in the water for a much shorter time period.

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found the net social benefits in improved high school graduation rates and reduced crime alone returns \$50,000 per child saved from lead exposure. Based on this, Regina is continually and cumulatively adding at

least \$48 million to our collective social costs for every cohort of lead-impacted children living under this Council's watch, and doubtless much higher when the aforementioned increased medical and education costs are added.

We can secure a better future for Regina, but only if you act now – starting with an immediate budget commitment for replacement water until our city is lead-free.

Thank you.