

# Investigation reveals signs of nationwide US water crisis

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The results of an investigation by British newspaper the *Guardian* reveal that, in the last decade, 33 major US cities have employed water testing “cheats” deliberately aimed at hiding dangerous levels of lead in their water supply.

The investigation identified three test manipulation methods known to hide actual lead levels: “pre-flushing” water pipes before testing, removing aerators from spouts, and deliberately running water slowly prior to collecting samples in order to prevent more lead from being dislodged from pipes. Each of these methods is in violation of recent US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines.

The documents examined by the newspaper also revealed further unethical practices carried out by many state governments, in addition to these three testing methods. In some states, like New Hampshire, water departments were reportedly instructed to perform tests in a manner that allowed enough time to retest, and remove the previous results, if lead levels in the initial samples were found to be too high.

Another example comes from Howell, Michigan, where an official from the department of environmental quality (MDEQ) is recorded in an email instructing a water department director to remove a sample with an unacceptable amount of lead in a deliberate attempt to conceal unsafe levels.

Of the 43 cities investigated, only four were found to be in compliance with EPA guidelines. Over the last 10 years, 33 cities have employed one or more of the above methods. Six were found to have used all three methods, including Springfield, Massachusetts; Lewiston, Maine; Philadelphia; Buffalo, New York; Sebring, Ohio; and Chicago.

This investigation, while substantial in its own right, is made even more damning considering that it was

able to uncover so many violations with such a limited scope. The research method employed was simply to contact 81 of the most populous cities east of the Mississippi and request documentation on how they test drinking water for lead. Not surprisingly, only 43 cities responded. It is safe to assume that cities with the more incriminating documented behavior were less inclined to hand over such information.

This ongoing water crisis is, without question, a problem facing more than just the few cities named above. Many of the large cities cited in this investigation sell their water supply to as many as 400 neighboring cities and towns. Studies sparked by previous crimes involving state-sponsored lead poisoning, like that of Washington, DC, in 2001; Durham and Greenville, North Carolina, in 2006; Columbia, South Carolina, in 2005; and Sebring, Ohio, in 2015.

Most recently, studies in Flint, Michigan, have revealed that even incredibly low levels of lead, well under the EPA mandated limit, can be damaging to human development.

In fact, the lead level at which the EPA requires action is not based on any health standard whatsoever. Instead, it is merely the product of a calculation that suggests that water in a minimum of nine out of ten homes susceptible to lead contamination will fall below that standard. In other words, even lead contamination at EPA levels at which action is required could result in significant public health problems.

Despite a congressional ban on lead water pipes in 1986, it is estimated that anywhere between 3.3 million and 10 million old pipes remain in use nationwide. Moreover, most researchers agree that a proper evaluation of health risks involving water quality extend well beyond lead.

There are innumerable contaminants that have yet to be properly researched, or are not tested or regulated. Efforts to reform water quality control have systematically been met by the opposition of various political representatives of the ruling class concerned about high cost of repair or regulations that would hurt profits in industries such as agriculture.

Coming on the heels of the water crisis in Flint Michigan in which 100,000 residents, over 9,000 of them children, have been poisoned by lead contaminated water from the polluted Flint River, the *Guardian* investigation has exposed the national scope of the crisis, as well as the scope of illegal activities on the part of various municipal governments.

Many local officials in the guilty cities have rushed to assure their constituents that the results of the investigation do not suggest a similar problem to that of Flint. Water department official Debra McCarty of Philadelphia, one of the cities guilty of all three methods, quickly went on record to report the “good news,” saying, “There are clear differences between Flint and Philadelphia.” However, the *Guardian* investigation suggests just the opposite.

While the case of Flint is an extreme manifestation of this problem, there are undeniable similarities between the events in Flint and other cities throughout the nation. Not only is at least one of the methods cited in this study the exact same manipulation tactic used in Flint to hide the lead contamination, but the outright denial by city officials of scientific evidence is also a characteristic common to the Flint crisis and every other water quality crisis in this country’s recent history.

The blatant attempt to downplay and contain this nationwide crisis to Flint alone, seen most recently by President Obama, shows the growing fear within the ruling class of a potentially explosive situation.

As events in Flint highlighted so sharply in the overwhelmingly bipartisan responsibility, the burden for these large-scale crimes, in part both malice and neglect, cannot be written off as individual mistakes or party-affiliated policy, but rather as a sign of a system in deep crisis.

The failure of the richest nation on the planet to provide even the most basic human necessity to its citizens, clean water, is a clear indication of the abject failure of the capitalist system and increasingly urgent

necessity for a reorganization of society along socialist lines.



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