



PRESS RELEASE
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Cities Initiative Launches Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership at White House Water Summit

New partnership will help accelerate lead service line replacement by facilitating close, purposeful collaboration among mayors and water utilities in Great Lakes big cities with the highest lead burdens

Washington, D.C. – April 23, 2024 – Today, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative was proud to attend the White House Water Summit to announce the commitment of Mayor Brandon Johnson of Chicago, IL, Mayor Cavalier Johnson of Milwaukee, WI and Mayor Mike Duggan of Detroit, MI to join the Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership.

Through the Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership, the Cities Initiative will work with Great Lakes big cities with the highest lead burdens to expedite lead service line replacement. Specifically, this first-of-its kind, mayor-led partnership will facilitate close, purposeful collaboration among Great Lakes big cities to highlight emerging best practices, surmount common challenges and replicate success from city to city in order to reduce the risk of lead exposure via drinking water.

There are an estimated 9.2 million lead service lines remaining in the United States, per the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A substantial portion of these are in Great Lakes big cities, with approximately 555,000 lead service lines concentrated in Chicago, Milwaukee and Detroit alone.

“Chicago has more lead service lines than any city in the United States, with many concentrated in neighborhoods that have experienced decades of disinvestment and neglect,” said Mayor Johnson of Chicago. “Through direct exchanges with counterparts in other Great Lakes big cities, the Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership will empower Chicago further with proven strategies to reverse these historic trends and accelerate lead service line replacement in the neighborhoods that need it most.”

“Milwaukee is making meaningful strides in expediting lead service line replacement and promoting equity,” said Mayor Johnson of Milwaukee, Co-Chair of the Cities Initiative’s Mayors Commission on Water Equity. “The Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership will enable us to showcase this progress across the region, as well as learn new ideas for improving our program from cities facing similar challenges.”

“In Detroit, we increased our contractor capacity and added employee crews to move from replacing 700 lead service lines per year to more than 5,000 this year with no impact on water rates thanks to state and federal funding,” said Mayor Duggan of Detroit. “The combined effort to deliver safe, affordable drinking water is getting the lead out at 200 houses per week. The Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership is the ideal coalition to help us sustain this incredible pace and secure additional funding from the federal government to remove 80,000 lead service lines as fast as possible.”

Great Lakes big cities are beginning to show tangible progress in implementing faster, more equitable lead service line replacement programs. Chicago was recently awarded a \$336 million EPA loan to replace 30,000 lead service lines over three years. Milwaukee committed last year to cut its replacement timeline by one third – to 20 years – by creating an Equity Prioritization Plan to guide its replacement efforts. Detroit has combined \$100 million from a variety of funding sources to replace 15,000 lead service lines in two years in addition to launching a neighborhood-by-neighborhood approach that incorporates socioeconomic indicators. The Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership will serve as an important forum to build upon these successes and maintain momentum to reduce the risk of lead exposure via drinking water.

There is no safe level of exposure to lead, a neurotoxin that has been scientifically linked to developmental delays, cardiovascular diseases and other serious health problems. There are also known societal and economic costs to lead exposure, with studies showing elevated risk levels in underserved communities and substantial financial costs for our health system.

About the Cities Initiative

The Cities Initiative is a multinational coalition of local governments led by mayors and chief elected officers working collaboratively to safeguard the economic, environmental and social health of communities in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin. The organization is committed to stewarding the basin's freshwater and ensuring that all residents have access to clean, safe and affordable water as the foundation for sustainable, vibrant, inclusive and resilient communities.

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