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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

A Global Commitment to Stop the Flow of Lead in Drinking Water

March 23, 2023, 11:00am-12:15pm

Conference Room 8, UN Headquarters, New York City

Organized by: Governments of Ghana, South Africa and Uganda; the World Health Organization; World Vision; WaterAid; the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation; LIXIL; RTI International; the Rural Water Supply Network; the Skat Foundation; the University of Leeds; The Water Institute at UNC; the International Water Association; the International, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Foundation; the World Plumbing Council; and the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials.



A recording of the side event can be viewed on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNouEmd66Ac>.

Background on the event

As part of our global commitment to provide water that is free from microbial hazards and priority chemical contaminants that impact human health, this coalition of governments, manufacturers and civil society partners will work towards preventing lead-leaching from new drinking water systems by 2030 and making all drinking water lead free by 2040.

We invite other states and organizations to be partners on the pledge and broader initiative and collectively advocate for the progressive elimination of lead and other toxic metals in drinking water systems. To become a partner, please go to www.globalleadfreewater.org.

Water Action Agenda

There is an urgent need to reduce human exposure to lead in the environment, including lead in drinking water—a source of exposure that is wholly preventable. An invisible, odorless and tasteless chemical contaminant present in water supply systems worldwide, lead is a toxin that irreversibly impacts neurological and cognitive development. Exposure in childhood or during pregnancy can cause lifelong harm, yet globally, 800 million—or roughly 1 in 3—children have elevated levels of lead in their blood.

The primary source of lead in many drinking water systems is lead-containing pipes and parts that leach lead into the water. While there is growing awareness of the long-term dangers posed by lead in drinking water, new systems across the globe continue to be built with unsafe materials.

Founding members of the consortium presented “A Global Pledge to Protect Drinking Water from Lead,” which aims to build momentum around local and global initiatives to progressively reduce lead exposure from drinking water and protect public health.

The pledge highlights actions to eliminate the use of lead-leaching parts in the construction of new drinking water systems and to improve the monitoring and remediation of existing systems that leach lead into drinking water. For more information, visit <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/global-commitment-stop-flow-lead-drinking-water>.

Key Issues discussed

The consortium invites governments, the private sector, manufacturers, suppliers, development banks, financial institutions, and philanthropic organizations and individuals to support global efforts by joining the Lead Pledge at www.globalleadfreewater.org and by working collectively to protect drinking water through the following actions:

- Ensure that all new water systems are constructed with products and materials that meet international standards for lead-leaching, material safety, and performance.

- For existing water systems that may contain lead-leaching materials, develop and implement plans for periodic water lead monitoring and data sharing, including the communication of monitoring results.
- Investigate water systems reporting lead levels at 10 parts per billion (the WHO guideline value) or above to identify contamination sources and implement necessary interim or long-term remedial measures to reduce human exposure.
- Support communities to reduce or eliminate exposure to lead through education and action such as designating safe taps for drinking and cooking.

Key recommendations for action

To implement these commitments, the consortium will support:

- Adoption of national policies and regulations based on international standards and testing/certification requirements for products and materials used in drinking water systems that address lead-leaching, material safety, and performance.
- Manufacturing of products and materials used in drinking water systems that meet international standards for lead-leaching, material safety, and performance.
- Affordable access to fittings, fixtures and filters that meet international standards for lead in drinking water.
- Development of low-cost technologies to enable widespread testing for lead in drinking water and materials to better understand the sources, impacts and mitigation/remediation of lead contamination in drinking water.
- Training and certification of professionals to oversee the design and construction of safe drinking water systems.
- National and local laboratory and monitoring capacity to assess and monitor lead in drinking water and materials to support the implementation of these commitments.
- High-quality research to better understand and identify sources, impacts and effective prevention and remediation methods and approaches to minimize harm from lead in drinking water.

Quotes from consortium representatives

“We should foster dialogue to find solutions that will enable us to eliminate lead and other trace metals from drinking water sources to enable us to achieve clean and safe water that will improve our well-being and socioeconomic development. I pledge, on behalf of Ghana, that we will continue to support the advocacy by the UN to progressively eliminate lead and other toxic materials or metals from drinking water systems.”

—**Hon. Cecilia Abena Dapaah, Minister, Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, Republic of Ghana**

“Human exposure to lead in the environment, including to lead in drinking water, can be prevented through dedicated early actions. Getting baseline information will, therefore, help our country to prevent exposure from old and new drinking water systems and make all

drinking water free from lead. The problem of lead cannot be addressed by one country alone, but requires collaborative action, including technical support using internationally agreed upon standards. We, therefore, decided to be founding partner and leader on the Global Lead Pledge.”

—**Hon. Sam Cheptoris, Minister, Ministry of Water and Environment, Republic of Uganda**

“The beauty of prevention might not always be recognized immediately. Maybe the glory will not be immediate. But we need to keep in mind, this is a classic, traditional, very strong argument for primary prevention, for removing this [lead in drinking water] source of damage to our health.”

—**Maria Neira, Director, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Health, World Health Organization**

“Access to safe drinking water is fundamental to improve public health outcomes within vulnerable communities. We must accelerate progress towards improving water quality globally and the Hilton Foundation is committed to doing our part and joining efforts to work towards lead-free water supplies.”

—**Peter Laugharn, President and CEO, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation**

“For centuries, the plumbing industry has been on the front lines of protecting public health and safety. IAPMO is proud to be a founding partner of this effort that highlights the important role products that meet international standards play in protecting water quality. By increasing access to clean drinking water, we are helping to improve the health and economic outcomes for families across the world.”

—**Dave Viola, CEO, International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO)**

“Clean, safe drinking water is a resource that is often taken for granted, but lead and other environmental contamination directly impacts health and communities. Underscoring LIXIL’s purpose of making better homes a reality for everyone, everywhere, we are proud to be a part of the Pledge aimed at implementing international standards, reinforcing the need for consistent water quality and safety more broadly around the world.”

—**Erin McCusker, Senior Vice President & Leader, SATO and LIXIL Public Partners, LIXIL**

“The evidence is clear: lead is an insidious poison that is ruining lives and damaging communities, but the good news is that it doesn’t have to be this way. We ask all those involved in funding, designing, procuring, building, maintaining and regulating water systems to take pride in their work and check the quality of what is being installed. Cheap, contaminated pipes and pumps come at a heavy cost.”

—**Sean Furey, Director, Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN) Secretariat, Skat Foundation**

“Clean water should be universally available for everyone; it’s a human right. It’s clear that drinking water should not be contaminated with lead, and this poisonous problem is avoidable if the practical steps set out in this pledge are urgently undertaken to eliminate lead from drinking water supplies. It’s essential that water systems’ components comply with international standards, along with regular robust surveillance. Commitment to change is vital to help ensure everyone everywhere has safe water access for good.”

—**Tim Wainwright, CEO, WaterAid**

“Lead is perhaps one of the most ubiquitous toxic metals in drinking water. No drinking water system, anywhere, should be constructed today with parts or components that can leach lead. It’s a simple step we can take to help protect the next generation.”

—**Aaron Salzberg, Director, The Water Institute at UNC**

“In order for water and sanitation resources to be sustainable, there must be a strong local industry to support it. This is why skilled labor must be a part of the solution in helping to deliver clean water free from lead and other contaminants. It makes perfect sense for us to wholeheartedly support the goal and ideals of the Global Lead Pledge at the United Nations. We look forward to working with industry associations worldwide to support better design and governance of water and sanitation systems and to advance education and training of workers critical to providing lead-free drinking water.”

—**Tom Bigley, Chair, World Plumbing Council**

“World Vision is committed to enhancing the lives of the world’s most vulnerable children through the provision of safe water. SDG6 can only be achieved through strong partnerships. So, we applaud this collective effort among multiple stakeholders to end lead contamination in drinking water that can potentially have such a detrimental impact on children’s health and development.”

—**Jean-Baptiste Kamate, World Vision International**