

UN 2023 Water Conference Youth Rapporteurs

Rapporteur: Kyle Rezek

Date: 23-03-2023

Event Title: *A Global Commitment to Stop the Flow of Lead in Drinking Water (side event)*

There is no safe level of lead for human health. Each year 1 million people die from lead around the world and one third of children have elevated lead levels causing adverse health effects. It is found in the drinking water practically everywhere; from developed to developing countries and from urban areas to rural areas. Bacteriological concerns in drinking water normally take precedent, but lead is a problem that also must be addressed and solved in order to take a large step in providing clean and safe drinking water access worldwide. Contamination sources are from lead containing pipes and parts which leach into the drinking water.

This is a completely preventable issue and the commitment proposed during the UN Water Conference was 'Lead Free Drinking Water by 2040' for both existing and new water systems. This commitment entails that lead leaching parts and components will not be used in construction after 2030 and work will be done to remediate existing drinking water lead systems by 2040. Uganda has enshrined in their constitution access to clean and safe drinking water as a fundamental human right. Since many of their water systems are of unknown materials, they are committed to addressing the problem in both old and new systems. South Africa, where water is a constitutional right, has taken steps to show that it is possible. The plastics industry partnered with the country and by 2012, the industry had lead free PVC pipes.

Erin McCusker from LIXIL said that private public partnerships is how this ambitious pledge will be delivered. She added that better homes are a reality, but there first needs to be clean and safe water which is usually focused on removing bacterial contamination and providing safe sanitation. By having the private sector work with the government, partnerships and delivery methods can be brought into countries and markets to also remove lead to bring the home clean water. A mix of regulation, monitoring, and evaluation with coordination among the various stakeholders upholding their responsibilities is necessary. Specific steps were laid out by Tim Wainwright of WaterAid including: pay attention to equipment procurement to ensure sufficient quality of the water supply, regularly test the water quality, and conduct research at the national level with government partners to clarify the ongoing situation.

Regulations of the equipment products manufactured within a standard quality is the first step in primary prevention of fixing and removing the problem. Quarterly water system and facility sampling to test if the heavy metals are within the standards will ensure compliance monitoring. A certificate of materials can be issued for lead free components such as pipes and pumps and replacing brass components with copper. Permits should be required for every borewell drilled so the water could be tested. Providing training with field and lab equipment to staff for monitoring lead in both the products and the water is critical for testing at each site. Monitoring directly at the source by using test kits developed for lead and other heavy metals to determine contamination above regulation limits out of use and marked to be fixed. Bringing awareness to agencies among both the public, government, and private sectors will help accelerate the commitment to removing lead from the drinking water.