



AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

TESTING WATER FOR LEAD IN SCHOOLS

Waukesha County, Wisconsin

THE PROBLEM

Using the Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking portal, Waukesha County Environmental Health staff were able to use 2010–2014 data to identify census tracts in their county where 13 to 17 percent of children tested for lead were poisoned, compared to 9 percent statewide. Many of the elementary schools in the county were built when lead was used in plumbing and fixtures. In an initial assessment, environmental health staff found many schools had not yet tested their water for lead.

WHAT WAUKESHA COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DID

Environmental health staff reached out to schools in their county asking if they'd like free lead testing. Five districts agreed to participate, and environmental health staff evaluated 21 schools. In total, they pulled 170 samples, with about nine samples from different water sources per school.

Of those samples, three exceeded the EPA limit of 20 ppb. After retesting, staff confirmed two water fountains from one school contained lead. School district staff marked these water fountains as “out of order” after the initial sample and removed them entirely after confirming the high lead levels. Environmental health staff retested the water service lateral with the third high level. The retest sample did not exceed the EPA limit. They deduced the initial high level was from an old brass faucet in the boiler room.

During testing, staff found that while many lead levels were low, a few samples had high copper levels. While copper was not the focus of the project, environmental health staff reported these findings back to the schools and suggested potential remediation strategies. Two schools are working with water utilities and the Department of Natural Resources to find a long-term solution.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

As a result of the project, two lead sources were removed from an elementary school. Waukesha staff also forged new partnerships with school facility and maintenance managers who will be assets for future environmental health projects, such as school radon testing. Waukesha County staff were transparent about communicating the purpose of this project upfront. Clear and open communication built trust between the schools, parents, and the Waukesha County staff.

The Waukesha School District reported to the environmental health staff that their participation in this project was included in a [referendum campaign](#) for school safety and building improvements. The referendum will be on the ballot in November 2018.

EXPLORE YOUR COUNTY'S LEAD
DATA:

dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht

WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM

Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health

dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht | SEPTEMBER 2018 | dhstracking@wi.gov

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