

MKE NUTRITION & LEAD TASK FORCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Alderman Tony Zielinski
tzeili@milwaukee.gov / 414.405.1483

Lead Transparency Resolution Challenges Health Department to Educate the Public About Lead in Water

MILWAUKEE – (July 13, 2017) – The Lead Transparency resolution — file #170131: ‘**Resolution relating to Health Department recommendations for avoiding lead exposure**’ — will be discussed at the upcoming Public Safety & Health Committee meeting next Thursday, July 20.

Among other directives, the resolution requires the Milwaukee Health Department to inform the community that lead in water is a health risk, that inexpensive filters are available for purchase and that families city-wide are encouraged to get tested for lead exposure.

Alderman Tony Zielinski, sponsor of the resolution and co-chair of the Milwaukee Nutrition & Lead Task Force, will hold a press conference in advance of the committee meeting to review the importance of the directives, summarize research about Milwaukee’s lead crisis and answer questions about the resolution. Alderman Zielinski’s 14th District in Bay View is heavily impacted by lead in water because it contains the highest volume of lead laterals leading to homes in Milwaukee.

“I offered this resolution because our own health department is not doing enough to inform people about lead in water and the need for water filters,” said Alderman Zielinski. “I am especially concerned for infants who rely on infant formula and their mothers who might unknowingly expose them to lead. The Health Department has failed our community by ignoring evidence-based research from the lead in water problems from both Washington, D.C. and Flint, Michigan.”

Marc Edwards, a University Distinguished Professor of civil engineering at Virginia Tech and nationally-recognized issue expert on lead exposure in drinking water, participated in a 2016 forum with Mayor Tom Barrett and DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp that identified Milwaukee’s current health advice to flush water to reduce lead exposure in homes as no longer adequate and outdated. Edwards shares concern about the Milwaukee Health Department’s ability to adequately and truthfully educate the public about lead in water.

“No one should rely on the Milwaukee Health Department to honestly inform the local medical community of evidence-based research about water lead risks to at-risk individuals (women of childbearing age, parents of infants and children younger than six) in homes with lead pipes,” said Edwards in a letter written to the Nutrition & Lead Task Force. “The laudatory statistics they cite to downplay water as a lead source have been gathered to monitor the children at greatest risk for lead paint and dust exposure—they are not designed to track the blood lead of pregnant women or infants using formula who are known to obtain most of their lead exposure from water.”

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“Our public education campaign—*Well Fed Means Less Lead*—includes basic self-help steps everyone can take to reduce lead exposure from paint, water and soil,” said Sherrie Tussler, co-chair of the Nutrition & Lead Task Force. “We’re encouraging the use of certified water filters and blood level lead testing for women of childbearing age, infants and children 6 and younger.”

Tussler continued: “We also know that hungry children absorb lead faster than well-fed children, and that a diet with good sources of iron, vitamin C and calcium can mitigate that absorption. The Nutrition & Lead Task Force is committed to ensuring all children are well fed and encourages people to learn more at **GetWellFed.org**.”

The media is encouraged to attend the press conference at **City Hall on Thursday, July 20 at 8:45 a.m.**

The Milwaukee Nutrition & Lead Task Force is a collaboration of public and private organizations working together to educate the Milwaukee community about sources of lead, the importance of testing water and people and the role of nutrition in limiting the rate of lead absorption. Exposure to unsafe levels of lead can cause serious health concerns, especially among children. Families can take immediate action by eating a healthy diet filled with iron, calcium and vitamin C.

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