



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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LEAD IN DRINKING WATER

Senate Bill 112 as passed by the Senate
First Analysis (3-16-94)

Sponsor: Senator Gilbert J. DiNello
Senate Committee: Natural Resources
& Environmental Affairs
House Committee: Conservation,
Environment & Great Lakes

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

In spite of increased public awareness during the past two decades of the hazards of lead in paint and drinking water, many citizens are still surrounded by lead residues and lead poisoning is among the most common of childhood diseases. Since lead solder in old plumbing often contaminates tap water, those who live in older buildings -- where plumbing systems that don't meet current standards often go undetected -- are especially at risk.

Rules were established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1991 to control and monitor lead and copper deposits in public water supplies. In addition, the EPA requires that each state make an effort to educate the public on the hazards of lead in drinking water. Legislation has been introduced to begin to address this requirement.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Safe Drinking Water Act to require the Department of Public Health to provide public information to all residents of the state on the hazards of lead in drinking water, and to include advice on ways to minimize human exposure. Under the bill, the department would be required to deliver this information annually to general circulation newspapers.

MCL 325.1015a

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the Senate Fiscal Agency, the bill's requirement that the Department of Public Health issue annual press releases would have no fiscal impact, since existing staff and resources would be used. However, if newspapers declined to print the information contained in the press releases, then the

department would incur the costs of purchasing space to issue a public notice, at an estimated cost of about \$5,000 annually. (10-1-93)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Lead is highly toxic, even in minute quantities. The problem is that, only a few months after entering the bloodstream, much of the lead migrates to the bones, where it can remain for decades, apparently without doing damage. However, it can re-enter the bloodstream and cause trouble. Young children are especially at risk because of the way lead damages the brain and nervous system. By causing deterioration of the central nervous system, even modest lead exposure causes developmental delays, hearing problems, and poor growth and coordination; lowers IQs; impairs memory; and affects the ability to concentrate. Government regulations have phased out most leaded gasolines, but the residue from the exhaust of millions of older vehicles is still poisoning the soil and waters near major highways. People who live in older housing are at risk from flaking layers of old, lead-based paint. In addition, tap water is contaminated by lead in old pipes. It is important that public education continue on this hazard. The bill would be a step in the right direction by assuring that the Department of Public Health provide this information.

Against:

Lead found in drinking water is one source, but by no means the only source, of lead poisoning. By requiring that the Department of Public Health inform the public only on the hazards of lead in drinking water, the bill could serve to over-emphasize the problems associated in one area to

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the detriment of other important sources of lead poisoning.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan State Medical Society supports the bill. (3-15-94)

The Department of Public Health supports the bill. (3-16-94)