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Zoe Woodcraft, Earthjustice, (415) 217-2071, (818) 606-7509, zwoodcraft@earthjustice.org

Denni Cawley, Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment, (385.707.3677), dcawleyuphe@gmail.com

Health, Environment & Children's Groups Call for National Strategy to End Lead Poisoning and Lead Exposure

Coalition asks federal agencies to make National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week more than symbolic

WASHINGTON, DC – A coalition of organizations across the country have sent a [call for action](#) to President Obama's Task Force on Environmental Health and Safety Risks to Children, calling for the U.S. to finally end lead exposure and poisoning for children. The coalition – comprised of experts in national, state, and local organizations focused on issues ranging from children's health to labor concerns, and from doctors to environmental justice advocates – are urging federal agencies with a legal responsibility to finally step up and do their jobs to protect children's health.

Lead is a potent neurotoxin with no safe level of exposure. Elevated blood lead levels harm young children's developing brains, leading to learning disabilities, loss of IQ points, and behavioral problems. Government scientists have concluded that lead is "reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen." In addition, prolonged exposure to lead is associated with high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney disease and reduced fertility. The human body mistakes lead for calcium, prompting our bodies to store lead in our teeth and bones. Failure to prevent lead poisoning in childhood affects future generations: lead in pregnant women can cross the placenta and build up in breast milk, meaning children's harmful exposure to lead often begins before birth and continues through infancy.

"Brain damage from even minimal lead exposure is essentially irreversible. Utah has not done enough to protect our infants and pregnant mothers from this hazard. **Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment (UPHE)** is pleased to join a national coalition in calling for the state and federal government to ensure that no Utah children are exposed to lead," said UPHE president, Dr. Brian Moench. UPHE will also launch a joint lead and radon outreach program with our partners, the [Salt Lake County Lead Safe Housing Program](#) and the [Utah Dept. of Environmental Quality Radon Program](#). Salt Lake County administers grant funds supported by the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative to qualifying homeowners, renters and landlords to make homes lead safe for children. They provide testing for children under the age of six who live in qualifying properties.

"Lead exposure crises are flaring in communities across the country. The high levels of lead in water and soil in Flint, Philadelphia, and East Los Angeles are not stand-alone incidents. They're alarm bells ringing loud and clear that we need to do everything we can on a national level to prevent neurotoxic lead exposure," said Lisa Garcia, Earthjustice's Vice President for Healthy Communities. "We know how harmful lead is for children, but the good

news is that we know how to prevent our kids from facing this danger. That's why we're calling for a plan of attack that will require federal agencies once and for all to end this public health hazard that hits our children and communities of color hardest."

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and independent scientists all agree that there is no safe level of human lead exposure. And yet, the CDC estimates that [over half a million preschool age children](#) in the United States have levels of lead in their blood high enough to require medical case management.

New Policy on Lead

The coalition of organizations from around the country sent their plan to the President's Task Force on Environmental Health and Safety Risks to Children, co-chaired by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Health and Human Services (the plan can be viewed online [here](#)). It calls for major actions from legally responsible federal agencies – with a focus on where lead exposure is hurting children, including:

- EPA must strengthen its standards and enforcement of those standards for lead in air, house paint, dust, soil, and drinking water to prevent the current unacceptable levels of lead exposure in our communities.
 - For example, it is urgent for EPA to reduce new sources of lead in the air children breathe, including from battery recyclers (lead smelters) and aviation fuel. To safeguard children from new lead exposure in everyday life, EPA must prioritize lead as a chemical of concern for immediate health risk evaluation and action under the newly reformed Toxic Substances Control Act this coming December.
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) must move to a primary prevention approach by identifying and remediating lead hazards *before* a child is harmed, and aligning its policies with current science to better protect families in their homes.
- The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) must move to ban all lead in children's and household products, and use its recall authority to do more to protect children from lead in products currently in homes.
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) must withdraw approval for cosmetics and food products currently sold in the U.S. that contain lead.
- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) must adopt stronger worker protection standards, including for pregnant women, to prevent and reduce their lead exposure.
- The CDC must ratchet down its definition of an elevated blood lead level to reflect that there is no safe level of lead exposure. Evidence shows that the CDC's current reference level of five micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood is far too lax, as levels below that carry harmful health impacts and families need to know much sooner if their children are being exposed to dangerous lead.

The Burden of Lead Exposure Falls Heavily on Children of Color

Due to the widespread industrial uses of lead in gasoline, paint, and metal products for decades in the United States, lead is in our water, soil, dust, and the air we breathe. It also enters our communities every year from new sources of lead, such as wheel weights, certain cosmetics, industrial facilities, and leaded aviation gas for piston-engine aircraft.

Children living in communities of color are most likely to suffer from lead exposure and poisoning. A [CDC report from 2004](#) showed that African American children are over three times as likely to have highly elevated blood-lead levels. African American and Latino communities are often more likely to live near active battery recyclers, former industrial sites, or highways, and to live in older housing that are sources of high levels of lead.

Scientists and Health Professionals Agree That Preventing Lead Exposure Is Urgent

In 2016 a distinguished team of scientists and health professionals united as [Project TENDR](#) (Targeting Environmental Neuro-Developmental Risks) released a consensus statement on toxic chemicals with the following statement:

“Lead exposure continues to be a preventable cause of intellectual impairment, ADHD and maladaptive behaviors for millions of children. Scientists agree that there is no safe level of lead exposure for fetal or early childhood development, and studies have documented the potential for cumulative and synergistic health effects from combined exposure to lead and social stressors. Thus, taking further preventive actions is imperative...we call on policy makers to take seriously the need to reduce exposures of all children to lead.”

For full statement, visit <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/EHP358/>

The organizations urging federal agencies to take up this comprehensive plan to prevent lead exposure include:

A Community Voice * Alaska Community Action on Toxics * Beyond Toxics * BlueGreen Alliance * California Communities Against Toxics * California Safe Schools * Center for Health, Environment & Justice * Clean Water and Air Matter * Coalition for Economic Survival * Comite Civico Del Valle * Community Science Institute * Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice * Del Amo Action Committee * Downwinders at Risk * Earthjustice * East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice * Ecology Center * Environmental Health Coalition * Environmental Health Strategy Center * Farmworker Association of Florida * Food & Water Watch * Friends of the Earth * Green & Healthy Homes Initiative * Health Justice Project * Healthy Babies Bright Futures * Healthy Homes Collaborative * Hoosier Environmental Council * Inner City Law Center * Institute of Neurotoxicology and Neurological Disorders * International POPS Elimination Network * Jesus People Against Pollution * Korean Immigrant Workers Alliance * Labadie Environmental Organization * Learning Disabilities Association of America * Missouri Coalition for the Environment * Natural Resources Defense Council * New Jersey Citizen Action * Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp. * Ohio Environmental Council * Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition * Oregon Aviation Watch * Pacoima Beautiful * Physicians for Social Responsibility * Public Citizens for Children and Youth * Sierra Club * United Parents Against Lead * Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment * WE ACT for Environmental Justice * Worksafe

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