

New Global Commitment Announced to Eliminate Lead from All Drinking Water Supply Systems by 2040

Inaugural convening event held at United Nations 2023 Water Conference

New York, N.Y. (March 23, 2023) – A consortium of governments, manufacturers and civil society partners at the United Nations (UN) 2023 Water Conference today launched a global commitment to achieve lead-free drinking water.

There is an urgent need to reduce human exposure to lead in the environment, including lead in drinking water – a source of exposure that is wholly preventable. An invisible, odorless and tasteless chemical contaminant present in water supply systems worldwide, lead is a toxin that irreversibly impacts neurological and cognitive development. Exposure in childhood or during pregnancy can cause lifelong harm, yet globally, 800 million — or roughly 1 in 3 — children have elevated levels of lead in their blood.

The primary source of lead in many drinking water systems is lead-containing pipes and parts that leach lead into the water. While there is growing awareness of the long-term dangers posed by lead in drinking water, new systems across the globe continue to be built with unsafe materials.

Founding members of the consortium presented “[The Global Pledge to Protect Drinking Water from Lead](#),” which aims to build momentum around local and global initiatives to progressively reduce lead exposure from drinking water and protect public health.

The pledge highlights actions to eliminate the use of lead-leaching parts in the construction of new drinking water systems and to improve the monitoring and remediation of existing systems that leach lead into drinking water.

Founding members of the consortium include the governments of Ghana, South Africa and Uganda; the World Health Organization; World Vision; WaterAid; the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation; LIXIL; RTI International; the Rural Water Sanitation Network; the Skat Foundation; the University of Leeds; The Water Institute at UNC; the International Water Association; the International, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Foundation (IWSH); the World Plumbing Council; and the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO).

Take the Lead Pledge, Work Collaboratively

The consortium invites governments, the private sector, manufacturers, suppliers, development banks, financial institutions, and philanthropic organizations and individuals to support global efforts by joining the Lead Pledge at

www.globalleadfreewater.org and by working collectively to protect drinking water through the following actions:

- Ensure that all new water systems are constructed with products and materials that meet international standards for lead-leaching, material safety, and performance.
- For existing water systems that may contain lead-leaching materials, develop and implement plans for periodic water lead monitoring and data sharing, including the communication of monitoring results.
- Investigate water systems reporting lead levels at 10 parts per billion (the WHO guideline value) or above to identify contamination sources and implement necessary interim or long-term remedial measures to reduce human exposure.
- Support communities to reduce or eliminate exposure to lead through education and action such as designating safe taps for drinking and cooking.

To implement these commitments, the consortium will support:

- Adoption of national policies and regulations based on international standards and testing/certification requirements for products and materials used in drinking water systems that address lead-leaching, material safety, and performance.
- Manufacturing of products and materials used in drinking water systems that meet international standards for lead-leaching, material safety, and performance.
- Affordable access to fittings, fixtures and filters that meet international standards for lead in drinking water.
- Development of low-cost technologies to enable widespread testing for lead in drinking water and materials to better understand the sources, impacts and mitigation/remediation of lead contamination in drinking water.
- Training and certification of professionals to oversee the design and construction of safe drinking water systems.
- National and local laboratory and monitoring capacity to assess and monitor lead in drinking water and materials to support the implementation of these commitments.
- High-quality research to better understand and identify sources, impacts and effective prevention and remediation methods and approaches to minimize harm from lead in drinking water.

Quotes from consortium representatives:

“The evidence is clear: lead is an insidious poison that is ruining lives and damaging communities, but the good news is that it doesn’t have to be this way. We ask all those

involved in funding, designing, procuring, building, maintaining and regulating water systems to take pride in their work and check the quality of what is being installed. Cheap, contaminated pipes and pumps come at a heavy cost.” **Sean Furey, Director, Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN) Secretariat, Skat Foundation**

“World Vision is committed to enhancing the lives of the world’s most vulnerable children through the provision of safe water. SDG6 can only be achieved through strong partnerships. So, we applaud this collective effort among multiple stakeholders to end lead contamination in drinking water that can potentially have such a detrimental impact on children’s health and development.” **Dr. Jean Baptiste Kamate, Chief Field Operations Officer, World Vision International**

“Clean water should be universally available for everyone; it’s a human right. It’s clear that drinking water should not be contaminated with lead, and this poisonous problem is avoidable if the practical steps set out in this pledge are urgently undertaken to eliminate lead from drinking water supplies. It’s essential that water systems’ components comply with international standards, along with regular robust surveillance. Commitment to change is vital to help ensure everyone everywhere has safe water access for good.” **Tim Wainwright, CEO, WaterAid**

“For centuries, the plumbing industry has been on the front lines of protecting public health and safety. IAPMO is proud to be a founding partner of this effort that highlights the important role products that meet international standards play in protecting water quality. By increasing access to clean drinking water, we are helping to improve the health and economic outcomes for families across the world.” **Dave Viola, CEO, International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO)**

“In order for water and sanitation resources to be sustainable, there has to be a strong local industry to support it. This is why skilled labor must be a part of the solution in helping to deliver clean water free from lead and other contaminants. It makes perfect sense for us to wholeheartedly support the goal and ideals of the Global Lead Pledge at the United Nations. We look forward to working with industry associations worldwide to support better design and governance of water and sanitation systems and to advance education and training of workers critical to providing lead-free drinking water.” **Tom Bigley, Chair, World Plumbing Council**

“Clean, safe drinking water is a resource that is often taken for granted, but lead and other environmental contamination directly impacts health and communities. Underscoring LIXIL’s purpose of making better homes a reality for everyone, everywhere, we are proud to be a part of the Pledge aimed at implementing international standards, reinforcing the need for consistent water quality and safety

more broadly around the world." **Erin McCusker, Senior Vice President, LIXIL; Leader, SATO and LIXIL Public Partners**

"Access to safe drinking water is fundamental to improve public health outcomes within vulnerable communities. We must accelerate progress towards improving water quality globally and the Hilton Foundation is committed to doing our part and joining efforts to work towards lead-free water supplies." **Peter Laugharn, President and CEO, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation**

"Lead is perhaps one of the most ubiquitous toxic metals in drinking water. No drinking water system, anywhere, should be constructed today with parts or components that can leach lead. It's a simple step we can take to help protect the next generation." **Aaron Salzberg, Director, The Water Institute at UNC**

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