



New Jersey
Work Environment Council
Safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment

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NEWS RELEASE

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Unsafe Lead Levels in Almost Half of Newark's Public Schools Tens of thousands of school children impacted

Testing at Newark schools has revealed lead levels above federal EPA action guidelines in at least 30 of the city's 66 school facilities. Exposure to lead can cause developmental delays, neurological changes and may have a lasting impact on kids' ability to learn. Statewide, there were [at least 3,000 new cases](#) of elevated lead levels in children under age six in 2015. As the chair of the statewide *Healthy Schools Now* coalition, the New Jersey Work Environment Council is concerned about the elevated lead levels that have been found in Newark schools, as well as the likelihood that this problem persists in other school facilities throughout the state.

The *Healthy Schools Now* Coalition works to ensure all students and teachers learn and work in healthy, safe and modern school buildings. The coalition has repeatedly called for more funding to address the serious facilities issues that plague districts throughout the state. Students and teachers in our state regularly deal with mold, extreme temperatures and poor indoor air quality. Unfortunately, the historic disinvestment in our cities and the failed education policies of the Christie administration have exacerbated facilities issues in districts around the state; we know the cost of needed facilities improvements likely tops one billion dollars.

We do not know, however, how many school buildings in the state have issues with lead, as that information is not specifically noted in the long-range facility plans that get submitted to the Department of Education. Many schools have old pipes, solder, fixtures, faucets, fittings, and water fountains; these may contain lead, bronze, or brass, which are lead alloys. Unfortunately, there are no laws requiring testing of drinking water in schools, except those that have their own water supply.

"Rusted or aging pipes need to be removed immediately to ensure kids are not being exposed to unsafe lead levels," said Dan Fatton, WEC Executive Director. "Going to school should not make our kids sick. We need to make sure that all school facilities issues are addressed and infrastructure is modernized."

Addressing these issues is a moral issue, but it also makes economic sense. According to a 2009 study by the [Council of Economic Advisers](#), every dollar in infrastructure investment would result in \$1.50 in GDP growth. Importantly, infrastructure investment also creates jobs. And there is no shortage of infrastructure projects in our state. According to the [American Society of](#)

[Civil Engineers](#), New Jersey faces 32.5 billion in wastewater infrastructure needs over the next 20 years and another 7.9 billion is needed for drinking water.

“The repair and maintenance of our schools, wastewater, drinking water, and transit systems is important for a variety of reasons, from educating the next generation of leaders to maintaining public health. These are smart investments for our future that will provide public benefit, creating jobs and spurring economic development,” said Fatton.

In the meantime, we have laws on the books that are not being enforced due to a lack of funding. Back in January, Governor Christie vetoed \$10 million earmarked for the Lead Hazard Control Assistance Fund, deciding instead to use the funds for plugging holes in the budget.

“Ignoring the pressing need for these monies to remove lead from aging buildings is misguided and short-sighted,” said Cheryl Y. Skeete, Executive Vice President, Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 12, American Federation of Teachers, NJ and WEC Board Member.

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New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) is a membership alliance of labor, environmental, and community organizations working for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment. WEC links workers, communities, and environmentalists through training, technical assistance, grassroots organizing and public policy campaigns to promote dialogue, collaboration, and joint action. Formed in 1986, WEC is the nation’s oldest state labor/environmental (or “blue/green”) coalition and has played a key role in winning and defending landmark state policies for worker and environmental protection.