

# Speaking Out

## *Flint crisis a reminder*



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GUEST ESSAYIST

National news media has focused on the horrific health crisis unfolding in Flint, Michigan. Corrosive water from the Flint River, in use since 2014, destroyed the protective coating inside old pipes, allowing lead to contaminate the city's drinking water. As a result, an increased number of children in Flint have been lead poisoned.

Over a decade ago, our community made the commitment to reduce lead poisoning—and we have produced results that make us proud. But, the unforgivable mess in Michigan reminds us to take a hard look in our own backyard. We don't have a water problem like Flint, but we continue to have a lead problem. Despite similar testing rates, in 2014 Rochester reported nearly twice as high a percentage of lead poisoned children as Flint. Lead poisoning from any source is an environmental injustice. We don't share this to diminish the tragedy in Flint, but to provoke a call to action. Many cities can provide similar heart-breaking statistics.

In Rochester, the biggest sources of lead poisoning is dust and paint in homes. Although 90 percent of the housing stock in both Rochester and

Flint was built before 1978, most of Rochester's housing was built before 1950, when lead paint was most widely used.

It's tempting to think that if you have lead-free water, your child is safe. But it's not true. Even if all the children in Flint get clean water and medical care, if they live in pre-1978 housing with chipping/peeling paint, they are not safe.

The parents of Flint are justified in their anger over the failure of those entrusted to protect them. The children in Flint who have been exposed to lead should be given every available resource to help them. Permanent protections from lead, including a holistic approach that looks at water and housing, should be put in place. We encourage you to support Flint by donating to the United Way of Genesee County, Michigan, Flint Water Fund.

If you live in a pre-1978 home, get it tested. Make sure all children are tested for lead at age 1 and again at 2 and whenever you think they may have been exposed to lead. Get more info at [www.letsmakeleadhistory.org](http://www.letsmakeleadhistory.org).

As we focus on the environmental health tragedy in Flint, we should renew our commitment to protect all children everywhere from being poisoned by lead.

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