

CASH-STRAPPED SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO PAY FOR LEAD TESTING

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) say “there is no known safe level of lead in a child’s blood.” Effects of lead poisoning include developmental delays, memory loss and brain damage.

The discovery of lead in drinking water in Portland public schools so soon after the lead crisis in Flint, Michigan, ignited alarm in schools across the state of Oregon, including those in Lane County.

Kerry Delf, associate director for communications for Eugene School District 4J, says that after tests this spring showed excessive levels of lead at the district office and three schools — Sheldon High School and Roosevelt and Kennedy middle schools — 4J has hired PBS Environmental + Engineering to test all water faucets used for drinking and making food district-wide.

4J last tested its drinking water for lead in 1998, Delf says, when it found and fixed the locations “where water samples were identified for concern.” Those same locations were tested this year.

Delf says the district-wide tests will cost an estimated \$25,000 or more, and the money will come from 4J’s general fund, with no state dollars yet available to help.

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA), which oversees many state health care programs, has never required school districts to collect water quality data unless they use a well, and Oregon school drinking water has not regularly been tested by the districts themselves. OHA is currently discussing guidelines or standards for school districts to follow.

“Think about how disturbing it is that the goal of sending children to school is to educate them to be productive members of society, and lead is a barrier to that,” says Lisa Arkin, executive director of the environmental justice nonprofit Beyond Toxics.

For public water supplies, the EPA recommends acting on lead levels of more than 15 parts per billion (ppb). For schools, since testing protocol differs, the action level is 20 ppb. The district sampled each fixture twice, once after the water sat overnight and again after flushing water through the system.

The highest lead levels — 866 ppb and 521 ppb — were found at a Roosevelt fountain, which is being demolished, and at Sheldon. After being flushed with water, most fixtures registered below the EPA’s action level, but three were still above that level.

PBS Environmental + Engineering will retest the buildings already tested by the district.

Joel Iboa, environmental justice and community outreach manager for Beyond Toxics, says he’s concerned that kids in low-income communities might be at greater risk because they are more likely to live in older homes where lead is already an issue. Malnourishment also worsens the effects of lead poisoning.

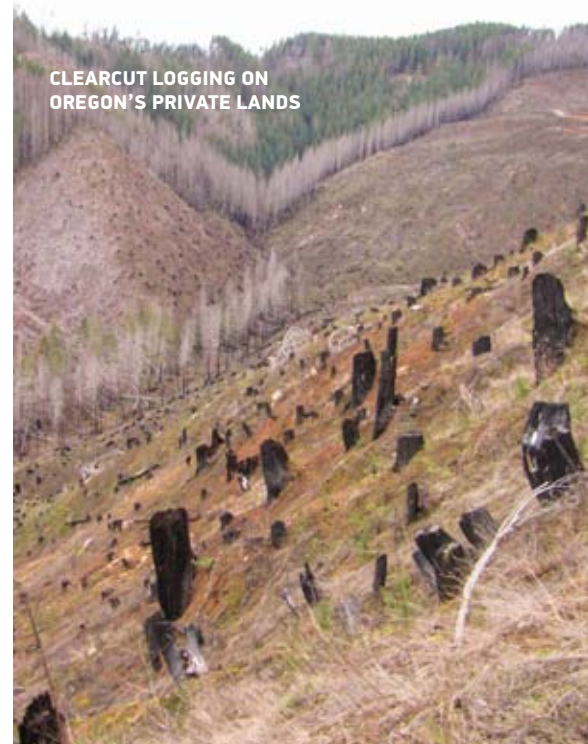
“I don’t think schools should be blamed,” Arkin says. “They didn’t have guidance and they don’t have the budget that allows them to deal with this problem.”

Delf says testing is underway, and once complete, the district will release the test results and determine the lead source. Delf says that based on the results of the preliminary testing, fixtures like faucets and sinks are most likely to blame for the presence of lead, in which case the district will replace fixtures and test again. If the problem is not resolved, the district will need to take further action.

“The follow-up to the testing will be important,” Iboa says.

Springfield and Bethel districts are also testing school drinking water. Until testing is complete, it’s unclear how much repairs will cost the districts.

Keep up with 4J’s progress at 4j.lane.edu/water, and learn more about lead poisoning at epa.gov. — Amy Schneider



CLEARCUT LOGGING ON OREGON'S PRIVATE LANDS

ACTIVIST ! LERT

- More than 4 million acres of Oregon’s forests have been converted **into single-species tree plantations**, enviro-justice group Beyond Toxics tells EW. Those plantations are helicopter sprayed with herbicides affecting our drinking water, salmon and health. Climate change means our forests, both public and private plantations, are more at risk for fire and drought. Tree plantations lack biodiversity and younger trees don’t store as much carbon as older, bigger trees, Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics says, despite greenwashing attempts to say otherwise from the forest industry. Check out the Oregon Forest Voices website, sponsored by Oregon Wild and BT, for a new drone video that dives dramatically into these tree plantations at oregonforestvoices.org.

- #StopOilTrains: 350 Eugene is hosting the “**Stop Oil Trains—Vigil & Procession**” at 7:30 pm Wednesday, July 6, starting at Kesey Square on the corner of Broadway and Willamette, then heading to the Amtrak train depot, 433 Willamette Street, with the event concluding at 9:30 pm. “This event marks the third anniversary of the Lac-Mégantic oil train explosion in Quebec. Forty-seven people were killed and 30 buildings burned in the town’s center. About 1.6 million gallons of oil was spilled,” according to 350 Eugene. The event also recognizes the recent oil train derailment and spill of Bakken crude near the Columbia River in Mosier, Oregon. 350 Eugene says, “Indeed, oil bomb trains pass through Eugene-Springfield on a regular basis. Hundreds of residents, businesses and public institutions, including the University of Oregon, Hult Center, Sacred Heart Medical Center—Downtown Campus and selected elementary schools, are in or very near the blast zone of these trains.” Organizers say that participants are encouraged to wear red to show solidarity. For more info, email 350Eugene@gmail.com or search “Oil Train Vigil and March” on Facebook for the event page.

- The first meeting of the **Vulnerable Populations Working Group** is scheduled for Wednesday, July 6, from 6 to 8 pm at the Hilyard Community Center, 2580 Hilyard Street. “Recognizing the homelessness crisis and the unlikelihood that the funding and implementation required for sufficient publicly funded shelter beds will come together before the rainy, winter months,” the Council of South Eugene Neighborhoods, which is made up of Friendly Area Neighbors, Southwest Hills Neighborhood Association, Southeast Neighbors and Amazon Neighbors) set a goal for the group to find 40 safe shelter spots for people experiencing homelessness by winter within the South Eugene area boundaries. The meeting will include a training session on the legal, community supported shelters options that are available and a talk from Terry McDonald, executive director of St. Vincent de Paul. Organizers say, “Neighbors are invited to join us to work towards local, community-based solutions.”



HAPPENING PEOPLE BY PAUL NEEVEL

SKIP JONES

Ever since 1999, when the Rooster Man, aka Gavin Fox, long-time host of KLCC’s Saturday afternoon Blues Power program, was struck down by ALS, Skip Jones has kept the weekly Rooster’s Blues Jam alive. “Rooster hired me to be the house drummer in 1990,” says Jones, a regular at the Monday night jams at Taylor’s Bar. After years of hopscotching from club to club, the jam has enjoyed a stable venue for the past six years, Tuesday nights at Mac’s at the Vet’s Club, 1626 Willamette Street. Admission is free.

“We have a robust turnout, between 20 and 40 musicians every night,” says Jones, who shares hosting duties with Byron Case. “The quality of musicianship is amazing.” Musician sign-up is at 6 pm, and music starts at 7.

As a kid growing up on the San Francisco Peninsula, Jones began playing ukulele and piano at home, then got into drums and guitar, and joined a band in junior high. “I lied and said I could play bass,” he says. “We played for our parents’ lavish events.” In high school, his band, United Straights of America, played rec halls, high school dances and the county fair. He visited Eugene on a 600-mile solo bike trip during the 1976 Bikecentennial, then moved here three years later.

Aside from a mid-’80s tour on bass with Canned Heat, Jones has worked as an independent contractor with local bands and events. He started his own band, Spirit of New Orleans, six years ago. “I work parties, weddings, wineries, clubs and festivals,” he says. His wife Mari teaches school in Elmira. Their son Kenny goes to college in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.