Portland parents decry officials over lead in school water

Elevated lead levels cause for concern

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND — In a city well known for its green activism, an environmental threat has bubbled up in an unexpected place: the drinking water at some public schools.

The Willamette Week newspaper reported late Tuesday that over half of the 90 school sites tested between 2010 and 2012 had elevated levels of lead in the drinking water at some locations.

The report, based on a pub-

lic records request, landed during an emergency meeting already underway to discuss why the Portland Public Schools failed to disclose elevated lead levels at two schools for nearly two months — and left the taps running for days while it completed repairs.

That news, first reported by The Oregonian last week, had already galvanized parents and led to an online petition for the resignation of Superintendent Carole Smith.

Rachel Brunette's 7-yearold daughter attends Duniway Elementary, a school listed has having elevated lead at a cafeteria dishwashing station and at drinking fountains in the Willamette Week report.

She is getting her kids

tested for lead poisoning this week.

"She's been complaining of occasional stomach aches and headaches and it's no big deal — but then you look on WebMD and it says these are possibly symptoms of exposure to lead," Brunette said of her eldest. "Suddenly it doesn't seem too benign anymore."

In March, the district arranged to test for lead at Creston K-8 School and Rose City Park School at the request of parents who were concerned about the unfolding public health crisis in Flint, Michigan.

Those tests revealed elevated levels of lead in 14 of 92 water sources at the schools, including a handful of drinking fountains, but parents were not told for weeks.

'This is not our protocol, this is not acceptable, and we're taking a number of immediate actions," Smith told parents Tuesday.

The district placed plastic bags over all water fountains districtwide Friday and will spend the summer testing lead levels at all schools. The last time such extensive testing was done was 2001.

The district has purchased nearly 1 million bottles of water for students through the end of the school year. Two district employees

trative leave as a result of the investigation, Smith said.

could be placed on adminis-

District spokeswoman Christine Miles did not respond Wednesday to requests for further details.

In April, Gov. Kate Brown called for a statewide review of what tools schools and districts have to test water.

She directed the Oregon Health Authority, which carries out Environmental Protection Agency water regulations at the state level, and the state Department of Education to also make recommendations for improvement.

Earlier this year, a Flint-inspired nationwide review by the USA Today Network found that more than 2,000 water systems fell short of EPA rules for lead,

It also found that the EPA has handed out 180 citations to officials nationwide for failing to immediately tell the public as was the case at the two Portland schools — when high lead levels are discovered.

Americans will hear more about lead in public school water in the months to come as nervous districts test for it, said James Montgomery, an associate professor in environmental studies at DePaul University and an expert on lead in

the environment. Many schools have aging infrastructure, making them especially vulnerable, he said.

"Once Flint hit, my prediction was, 'This is going to ripple like a seismic wave out, and it has," he said.

AP Reporter Kristena Hansen contributed to this report.

Sage grouse concerns nix Oregon energy project

Associated Press

BEND — A federal appeals court has nixed a large wind energy project in southeast Oregon.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last week that an environmental review by the federal Bureau of Land Management failed to adequately assess the winter population of greater sage grouse at the proposed facility near Steens Mountain in Harney County.

Columbia Energy Partners proposed the project for roughly 10,500 acres of private land. The project called for 40 to 69 wind turbines and a 230-kilovolt transmission line to bring the energy to the electrical grid.

The BLM had approved the project, and Harney County granted a key permit.

"One more lost opportunity for our community," Judge Steve Grasty, a top official in the county, told The Bulletin newspaper.

Environmental groups challenged the BLM's environmental review of the project. It needed the environmental review partly because the transmission line's right of way would cross public lands.

Jeanne Stafford/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The greater sage grouse.

broods. They also eat pretty much only sagebrush through the winter. Loss of sagebrush habitat has contributed to sage grouse population decline in Oregon. The appeals court deci-

sion said the BLM completed no surveys on whether sage grouse were at the site during the winter. "The inaccurate informa-

tion and unsupported assumptions materially impeded decision-making informed and public participation," the decision said.

Brent Fenty is executive director of the Oregon Nat-Greater sage grouse need ural Desert Association, a tise that courts lack. sagebrush year-round for mat- Bend-based environmening, nesting and rearing their tal group that brought the ing," he said.

lawsuit. He called the wind project the "right idea in the wrong place" and noted the association's 2009 report that analyzes wildlife habitats and landscapes in Oregon's High Desert to identify areas where wind projects would have the least impact.

Fenty said "hundreds of thousands of acres" should have been considered before the Steens Mountain location.

Grasty questioned the ability of courts to interpret land management-related sions, saying land managers should be given deference because they have the exper-

"It's incredibly frustrat-

Smith: Judge will use hospital report to help determine Smith's mental state

Continued from Page 1A

The report will not make findings or conclusions regarding Smith's mental state during the alleged

Smith, 42, of Vancouver, Washington, is accused of murdering her toddler and attempting to kill her teenager at a Cannon Beach resort in 2014.

The trial is scheduled for

In previous court hearings, Judge Matyas said she has not observed any unusual behavior from Smith, but still appointed psychologist Brooke Howard to do an independent evaluation.

Howard found Smith suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, but could not conclude whether she is unable or unwilling to aid and assist in her defense.

In her report, Howard recommended Smith be sent to the state hospital for observation.

Clatsop County District Attorney Josh Marquis is challenging a portion of Howard's report that cites a mental examination conducted by Michele Crump-Hart, clinical director at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare.

Smith had a consultation in February with Clatsop Behavioral Health- noted a number of mental Smith's mental state.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian Jessica Smith, shown here before a court appearance in January, has returned from the state hospital.

care, the county's mental health provider, to determine if the county has the expertise available to treat Smith if she is found unfit to proceed.

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare concluded it does not have the resources available.

"There are no known community restoration programs in either Tillamook or Clatsop County to assist this client with the ability to aid and assist in her own defense," the agency

concluded.

health issues with Smith and determined she suffers from a mental illness, according to Smith's defense lawyers Lynne Morgan and David

The defense lawyers say Hart's observations are relevant and should be included as evidence. Marquis wants Hart's input thrown out. Judge Matyas will decide at the upcoming court hearing

Ultimately, Smith's mental fitness to proceed is up to Judge Matyas. The judge will use the state hospi-However, Crump-Hart tal report to help determine

THE DAILY ASTORIAN



Evening listings **THURSDAY**

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