

EPA warns of lead in water fountains

From Associated Press reports

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said Monday that more than a million school water fountains still have lead components or lead-lined tanks, posing possible health risks to youngsters.

EPA officials said they would soon issue a detailed guide for school officials on how to test for unhealthy lead levels, and the agency listed 113 manufacturers' model numbers for fountains in which lead levels were found to be of concern.

The officials emphasized that school water fountains probably account for only a very small part of the lead exposure that youngsters face. And they said it was uncertain whether the high lead levels in some coolers were from the coolers or water pipes.

Nevertheless, said Mike Cook, director of the EPA's office of water contamination, the agency urged school officials to test cited coolers, especially those in which tanks were

found to be lined with lead. "We found very high levels of lead in these (lead-lined) tanks," said Cook.

The EPA has no authority to order the testing, but a law enacted last year requires states to begin a program to assist school districts in testing for lead in drinking water. School officials in many states already have testing programs under way, officials said.

Lead is a toxic metal that harms health even at low levels of exposure. It can cause damage to the brain and nervous system and lead to learning disabilities, hearing impairment and interference in the formation of red blood cells, according to the EPA.

The EPA considers that a lead level of 20 parts per billion in water poses health risks, especially if a child is also exposed to lead from other sources. The agency estimates lead in drinking water typically accounts for about 20 percent of the total exposure in young children.

"We think that there are a few

hundred thousand children who have enough lead from other sources so when lead from drinking water is added at levels of 20 parts per billion there will be some adverse health impact," said Cook in an interview.

While the agency gave no specific levels of lead in water from all the coolers cited by model number, it said the coolers were singled out only after levels were found to be in the unhealthy range.

In coolers with lead-lined tanks, the levels were more than "several hundred" parts per billion and in some cases when long-standing water was tested, the level was more than 1,000 parts per billion, according to Cook. In the other coolers cited by the EPA, often only a single soldering connector brought lead into contact with the water.

The agency said it had no estimate on how many coolers with lead-lined tanks are still being used in schools. Cook said the EPA "stumbled" upon the tanks, all on coolers made by Halsey Taylor Co., when examining

22 water coolers provided by the U.S. Navy.

Nine of the Navy coolers were found to have lead-lined tanks, causing the EPA's concern. Cook said similar water coolers are used in schools and that the EPA received two such coolers from school officials in Portland, Maine.

The new law requires the EPA to issue detailed guidelines on how to detect lead contamination in school water systems as well as provide a list of the brand and models of water coolers that have lead components. There also is a timetable for eliminating those coolers or correcting the problem.

The coolers cited by model number were manufactured by the Halsey Taylor Co., EBCO Manufacturing Co., and Sunroc Corp. The EPA said that two other companies have yet to reply to inquiries on lead content in their coolers and that a third said it produced no coolers with lead components.

Lobbyists support rights to abortion

From Associated Press reports

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of abortion rights activists, buoyed by the record turnout for their march on the Capitol, lobbied members of Congress on Monday as stalwarts of the women's movement predicted that their effort will leave a lasting impression on the Supreme Court.

That view, however, was not shared by at least one member of the Bush administration, Vice President Dan Quayle.

The march was "nothing unusual in this town," he said. "I don't believe the Supreme Court should be, nor do we expect it to be, swayed by a demonstration. That is not the way the system is supposed to work. They are there to render a legal opinion."

White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater said: "Everyone has the right to march and present their views. It appears that it was a very successful march over the weekend in terms of the number of people they wanted to get here. They presented their views very effectively and that's good."

Advocates who took part Sunday in the largest abortion rights rally got their first taste of lobbying as they traveled from House offices to Senate buildings, delivering information packages containing a 30-minute "Abortion for Survival" video and pressing their cases.

In most instances, lawmakers were absent and activists met with congressional staff. But the circumstances did little to dampen their enthusiasm.

"We'd like very much for him to see it," Jeanette Newsom, of Sylva, N.C., told a staff member for Republican Sen. Jesse Helms as her husband Gene presented the packet.

The couple — he's a farmer, she's a librarian from the tiny town of 1,700 near Asheville — have written Helms in support of the Equal Rights Amendment, nuclear freeze and environmental issues. They traveled from Sylva to march in the demonstration and lobby in person.

"After lobbying on the state

level, we naively assumed we could do it here in Washington, D.C.," said Gene Newsom before the couple headed to the offices of North Carolina's other senator, Democrat Terry Sanford.

Hundreds of thousands of activists, including mothers with small children, Hollywood stars and college students, converged on the Capitol to show their support for the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion.

Law enforcement officials estimated the crowd at 300,000, but Eleanor Smeal, president of the Fund for the Feminist Majority, put the total at 600,000.

The turnout far exceeded the 90,000 people who gathered for a March 1986 abortion rights rally in Washington and the numbers organizers had predicted. Leaders said the response will have an impact on the Supreme Court.

"Nobody in public office isn't affected by a huge outpouring," said Molly Yard, president of the National Organization for Women (NOW).

Questioned about lobbying members of Congress rather than focusing on the court, Yard noted that lawmakers are in contact with the nine justices.

"Do you think the leadership in this body doesn't talk to the Supreme Court? Sure they do," Yard said. "Do you think members of the Bush administration don't talk to the Supreme Court? Sure they do."

Francoise Jacobsohn, president of the New York City chapter of NOW, said the congressional lobbying was "a logical progression of what we did yesterday. We have a political army."

"We cannot stand for erosion. We have been complacent," said Jacobsohn, who said in the past the attitude has been, "we already fought this fight, why do we have to fight it again?"

Activists plan to gather again on April 26 when the court will hear arguments in a Missouri case that pro-choice and anti-abortion forces agree could significantly alter the ruling that gave women the right to an abortion.

PLO criticizes Israeli elections proposal

From Associated Press reports

TUNIS, Tunisia — The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) said Monday the Israeli proposal for elections in the Israeli-occupied lands is "totally unacceptable."

Wafa, the PLO news agency, said elections proposed by Yitzhak Shamir, the Israeli prime minister, are "nothing but a reactivation of the self-autonomy scheme of the Camp David accord, which the PLO and our entire Palestinian people already have rejected."

George Habash, head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of

Palestine, said in a statement issued in Damascus, Syria:

"We will not allow the Shamir plan to pass. We will not allow elections to be held under enemy army bayonets. We will not allow the creation of a substitute leadership, whatever their name or color might be."

Habash's Marxist organization is the second-largest group in the PLO after Yasser Arafat's Fatah, the main Palestinian fighting force.

Under Shamir's plan, proposed last week in Washington, Palestinians

would choose representatives for negotiations about an interim settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which Israel captured in the 1967 war.

An Israeli government official in Jerusalem quoted Shamir on Monday as saying he was willing to discuss participation in proposed elections by Palestinians from outside the territories.

The official said those elected also might consult during negotiations with the PLO, with which Shamir refuses to deal, because "no one can

think the PLO is an element you can totally ignore."

In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the PLO should "explore practical ways to advance the peace process." He declined to say whether the United States was asking the PLO to endorse Shamir's plan, which received President Bush's qualified support.

Shamir said in Chicago that Arab countries should contribute financially to helping Israel "establish a human condition" for Palestinians in refugee camps.

North denies charges of misusing funds

From Associated Press reports

WASHINGTON — Oliver North, seemingly struggling to keep his temper, on Monday defended his stewardship of an Iran-Contra cash fund and insisted the money he paid for a used car came instead from a \$15,000 family cache kept in a metal box bolted to a closet floor.

At the start of cross-examination during his trial, North said he kept track in a spiral-bound notebook of every penny he disbursed from the Iran-Contra fund, which totaled between \$240,000 and \$300,000.

"The ledger is still around?" asked prosecutor John Kecker.

"It was destroyed," North said.

"Do you know who destroyed it?"

"Yes," he said. "I did."

Later, Kecker asked whether North was nervous about destroying the ledger. North said not, because "I couldn't believe I could ever be accused of doing anything dishonest with that money."

Kecker touched on other charges and North fired back answers in quick succession.

On the \$13,800 security system installed at his home, paid for by co-defendant Richard Secord: "To this day, I don't know exactly who or how that security system was paid for..."

I did intend to pay for it."

On a \$200,000 insurance fund set up for North's family by Iran-Contra moneyman Albert Hakim: Asked if he knew Hakim is charged with bribing him, North said, "He is not guilty of it, because Mr. Hakim did not try to bribe me."

On profits by Secord and Hakim: Kecker asked if he knew whether Secord made "a few hundred thousands or millions" and North said he didn't know. But, he added, "I believed then and I believe today General Secord was taking fair and just compensation for the many hours

he was putting in."

Kecker asked North if, "in fact, everybody was taking a piece" of the money involved.

"No, that is not so," said North. "You are talking to one who didn't."

Earlier Monday, North testified that former President Reagan and his attorney general, Edwin Meese, concealed U.S. involvement in a November 1985 shipment of Hawk missiles from Israel to Iran.

In a meeting on Nov. 12, 1986, Reagan clearly "had made a decision not to disclose" the shipment, North said.

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