

T3-2022-16220 Comments Portland Water Bureau

1 message

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I appreciate Land Use Planning Hearings Officer providing this opportunity to hear community testimony.

I'm speaking on behalf of Portland Advocates for Lead-free Drinking Water.

Portland Water Bureau's legacy is a story of a public water system keeping people in the dark.

The Water Director and her Communications staff frequently rely on omissions, rhetoric, or euphemistic language — whether to over-amplify low-level cryptosporidium or to deny the Bureau's pervasive lead in water problem. Citizens who call out unsafe Bureau practices and policy are regularly ignored, dismissed, censured ... and worse.

PWB's regulator (OHA) has taken a hands off approach on oversight.

Consequently, PWB is emboldened to deflect blame for their mistakes despite a troubling history of Bureau malfeasance; e.g. illegal procurement practices or a successful lawsuit on "systemic corruption", to name just two*.

We raise our children here, assured over and over by PWB that Portland water is pristine and safe to drink.

But in order to sell projects to the public, **PWB tells sometimes wildly different or even untrue stories**; that filtration is federally required (even while it's not!), to "keep our water safe" and conversely :

"The number of crypto[sporidium] is sounding off alarm bells!" - Portland water director Gabriel Solmer & former Portland water commissioner, July 2017 **

Meanwhile, PWB won't admit they have a massive amount of corroded, aging and lead pipes to replace in the city. In 1997, Portland Water chose to spend money on lead paint mitigation instead of lead in water mitigation, so they devised an "alternative" to federal LCR compliance. That broken policy is still in place.

Portland Water Director Gabriel Solmer claims, *"Portland has never used lead service lines, so there is no inventory of lead pipes to map"*.

This is false, with data as recently as last month showing PWB found pigtails (short lead pipes) and has lead-contaminated service lines in their distribution system.

In 1990, the Water Quality Policy Director for Portland Water Bureau wrote an industry paper titled, "Convincing The Public That Drinking Water is Safe". Inarguably, it remains the Bureau's operating instructions, with one guiding principle: "They must be told what you have determined they ought to know..." And it has worked well for them, as in 2016 when lead was found at both Portland and Newark public schools. While Newark eventually admitted city-wide treatment issues were damaging pipes and releasing lead, leaders here distracted the public by raising alarm bells on cryptosporidium, pressuring a public advisory board** for a massive new filtration plant (over several treatment options).

In 2021, EPA loaned the City their "largest loan to date" - \$727M to fund **the most expensive treatment option at the most expensive location**. Notably, a sliver of this federal WIFIA loan will finance a less-than-adequate response to Portland's long-standing (but downplayed) lead in drinking water issues.

PWB's website proclaims, "We serve excellent drinking water every minute of every day!"

Slick PR messaging such as this is pervasive, reinforcing an unaccountable PWB culture.

We're grateful to the excellent research done by national experts and citizens alike, for bringing awareness to facts, science, sound water utility policy & practices and the truth VS relying on regulatory loopholes and excuses. Water officials here have worked strategically and effectively since 1990 to employ the latter.

For these reasons and more, **please do not approve** Portland Water Bureau's application for a land use permit.

Thank you.
on behalf of
Portland Advocates for Lead-free Drinking Water

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<https://www.opb.org/news/article/portland-city-auditor-evidence-illegal-practices-water-bureau/>

<https://www.oregonlive.com/politics/2019/04/five-portland-water-bureau-workers-sue-city-claiming-systemic-corruption.html>

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<https://www.opb.org/news/article/portland-cryptosporidium-water-public-utility-board-treatment/>