Congress of the United States
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JEFFORDS, SARBANES, NORTON & WAXMAN INTRODUCE LEAD-FREE DRINKING WATER ACT

WASHINGTON, DC — Sens. Jim Jeffords (I-VT) and Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) and Reps. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) and Henry A. Waxman (D-CA) today introduced legislation to overhaul and strengthen the federal rules governing lead testing and standards in the nation's public water systems.

The legislation comes in response to reports of elevated lead levels in the drinking water systems of Washington, DC and Boston and the weaknesses these incidents have identified in current regulations concerning public notification, testing methodology and corrective actions.

The Lead-Free Drinking Water Act of 2005 would place new responsibilities on the Environmental Protection Agency and public water systems nationwide to ensure that our nation's public health is not compromised by lead in our drinking water.

Jeffords said, "We have known lead is a poison for centuries. What are we waiting for? As we learned from the incidents in Washington, DC and Boston, there are large deficiencies in federal safe drinking water regulations. It is time to plug the holes in those regulations and fully protect the public from this poison."

"Lead poisoning is one of the most serious, but preventable, environmental health hazards threatening our nation's children," said Sarbanes. "This legislation works to alleviate this hazard with a special emphasis on lead testing and remediation in our schools and child care facilities, and on protecting infants, children and pregnant women — those who are the most vulnerable to lead poisoning."

Norton said, "A lead water crisis in the nation's capital has been enough to put clean water front and center on the national agenda. By correcting major deficiencies in requirements for clean water, our bill puts this issue on the congressional agenda for action."

Waxman said, "We now know that up to 10 million Americans may have been exposed to high levels of lead in their drinking water during the past five years. The current regulations are not doing the job. We need this bill to protect our children from the terrible, but entirely preventable, effects of toxic lead in their drinking water."

In drinking water systems, lead is found in some service lines and pipes in distribution systems, in solder, and in plumbing fixtures. EPA estimates that about 20% of lead exposure comes from lead in drinking water.

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Last year, *Good Housekeeping* magazine spotlighted the dangers of lead in drinking water and asked its readers to contact Members of Congress with their comments. Since then, Congress has received more than a thousand responses from individual readers in forty-eight states and the District of Columbia expressing their concern for the issue and supporting the legislation.

Lead exposure is particularly dangerous for children, who retain about 68% of the lead that enters their bodies. Children exposed to lead may experience low birth weight, growth retardation, mental retardation, learning disabilities, muscle cramps, stomach cramps, anemia, and kidney and brain damage. Lead can also be particularly harmful during pregnancy, affecting the unborn child or causing complications in pregnancy.

The bill:

- Requires the EPA to revise the national primary drinking water regulations for lead in drinking water to ensure protection of vulnerable populations such as infants, children, pregnant women, and breast-feeding mothers;
- Requires better notification for residents when a water system has high lead levels;
- Requires increased water testing and lead remediation in schools and day-care centers nationwide;
- Provides more federal funding to upgrade water distribution systems;
- Bans plumbing components with elevated lead levels.

For more information, visit http://epw.senate.gov/minwelcome.cfm?party=dem or www.democrats.reform.house.gov.