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Utah Gov. Cox Signs Bill to Protect Children from Lead in Drinking Water

Salt Lake City (March 28, 2022) — The International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO®), along with its partners at the American Supply Association, NSF international, and the Water Quality Association, applauds the state of Utah for passing House Bill 21 into law, which advances the state's efforts to address water quality testing for schools and child care centers. Gov. Spencer Cox signed HB 21 into law on Thursday.

"I am pleased to sign HB 21 into law and help protect the health and safety of school children in Utah," Cox said. "Utah is taking the appropriate steps to get the lead out of drinking water and ensure that our children are drinking safe and clean water."

Sponsored by Rep. Steve Handy (R-16) and Sen. Jani Iwamoto (D-4), HB 21 outlines timelines for schools and child care centers to test the quality of water in their buildings and report that testing data. Facilities will then need to take action if the presence of lead is above 5 parts per billion, keeping in line with the industry's current drinking water quality standards and product capabilities.

Lead can enter drinking water when plumbing materials that contain lead corrode. Even low levels of lead exposure can cause permanent cognitive deficits and behavioral difficulties in children. As the federal government allocates money to states for them to address water quality and replace lead services lines, it is critical to remove and replace plumbing fixtures, faucets, and pipes within the building that may be leaching lead.

"When I got involved in running this bill four years ago, I was always focused on the health of schoolchildren," Handy said. "All outside stakeholders felt that it was a good idea, as did most legislators, but we could never identify a funding source. It took American Rescue Plan Act funds to finally get it over the finish line. We brought all parties together, including private child care providers. It's going to be a great initiative that will protect the lives of thousands of Utah children."

The bill also directs the state's Drinking Water Board, in coordination with the Department of Health's Division of Drinking Water, to develop regulations that determine which actions are effective to reduce lead levels and the timeframe in which those actions must be taken.

"We're grateful for Rep. Handy's leadership in addressing this urgent public health issue by providing the tools that will help us better protect Utah's most vulnerable from lead poisoning," said Tim Davis, director of the Division of Drinking Water in Utah. "We are committed to supporting schools and child care centers through this process and look forward to the day when we have tested every tap."

"IAPMO looks forward to working with state officials to ensure that appropriate and effective products are used for remediation within these school and day care facilities," said Robyn Fischer, director of Government Relations for The IAPMO Group. "Products that have been certified to meet industry standards for safety and efficacy are crucial to help reduce the presence of lead in drinking water and protect children's health and well-being. Replacing aging infrastructure within buildings will amplify the efforts to replace lead service lines and build community resilience. This law advances Utah on the path to cleaner and safer drinking water for its residents."

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