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TIME TO GET THE LEAD OUT OF DRINKING WATER

New CELA Report

Photo credit: Linda Plm

CELA Calls on Ontario to Get the Lead Out of Schools

Dangerous levels of lead are showing up in water samples taken from some Ontario public schools and the province needs a new approach to protect children from lead exposure, says a [new CELA report](#).

The report, **Time to Get the Lead Out of School Drinking Water**, uses publicly available data to rank the school boards and schools with the highest number of water tests that exceeded the provincial limit, illustrating the need for action.

Even at very low levels of exposure, lead can impact children's developing brains, causing decreased IQ, decreased attention span, motor skill weaknesses, and behavioural problems.

For nearly 20 years, Ontario's regulation aimed at preventing lead exposure in schools and child care facilities has allowed old lead infrastructure to be left in place after it is found. Instead of prioritizing effective solutions, such as

removing lead or installing a filter, the regulation allows for the use of outdated Band-Aid measures like flushing water through a problem tap or fountain once daily.

School boards deserve to have access to the resources they need to keep their schools in good condition and their students safe.

CELA recommends that the Ontario government provide financial support to school boards to remove lead sources from drinking water infrastructure once and for all. The report also encourages school boards to voluntarily adopt updated best practices and to advocate for provincial-level change.

[Read the report](#) to learn more about lead in schools and see if your school board is featured.

Case Updates

Case Update - Benzene Emissions near Aamjiwnaang First Nation

In 2024, the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) issued orders against INEOS Styrolution (INEOS) related to the company's benzene emissions from their factories near Sarnia and Aamjiwnaang First Nation. The orders require INEOS to address harmful benzene emissions - benzene is a carcinogen and harmful to human health. Along with emissions from this facility, Aamjiwnaang First Nation members live near many other polluting facilities in Ontario's so-called "Chemical Valley".

INEOS appealed the orders to the Ontario Land Tribunal. CELA represented community members on the appeal, alongside Aamjiwnaang First Nation, another community member, and the MECP. INEOS has recently withdrawn its appeal on most issues, and a case management conference is scheduled for November 2025. Air pollution and other environmental concerns remain a serious health issue for Aamjiwnaang First Nation members based on its proximity to many polluting facilities.

Another Federal Decision on Chalk River NSDF

Last month, we shared updates about two Federal Court decisions relating to the proposed Near Surface Disposal Facility (NSDF) in Chalk River, Ontario. A new decision on a third legal challenge was released on March 14th.

In this most recent [decision](#), the Court ruled in favour of Kebaowek First Nation and other applicants. The applicants say Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) erred when granting a Species at Risk Permit to destroy endangered species and their residences during construction of the NSDF.

The decision by ECCC to issue a permit will be sent back for a re-determination.

Law Reform Updates

Slow-Walking Toward Justice on “Forever Chemicals”

PFAS chemicals, because they are extremely persistent in the environment, are called “forever chemicals”. It would be ironic – not to mention concerning – if it took forever to develop regulations to control them!

But, with a March 2025 federal government announcement, the potential is there for Canada to take an uncomfortably long time trying to put a stranglehold on the estimated 4,700 PFAS chemicals there may be in Canadian commerce.

Read more in CELA's [recent blog post](#).

Concern about Advancing Nuclear Opportunities in Ontario

In response to a posting on the Environmental Registry of Ontario, CELA recently [submitted comments](#) relating to proposed regulatory amendments to allow Ontario Power Generation (OPG) to recover the costs of engineering, design, and costing work for potential Pickering refurbishment from ratepayers. This is accomplished by payment by the Integrated Electric System Operator (IESO) to OPG pursuant to order of the Ontario Energy Board.

Proposed Accession of Costa Rica

CELA recently [submitted comments](#) in response to a consultation by Global Affairs Canada seeking views on the accession of Costa Rica to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans Pacific Partnership. CELA has had a longstanding interest in the intersection of trade and the environment.

Webinars and Resources

Environmental Penalties to Fund Community-Led Projects

Environmental fines and penalties are a crucial tool to hold individuals and corporations accountable for the damages they cause to the environment. In Canada and in Ontario, these fines and penalties are imposed for violations of environmental regulations at the federal and provincial levels, and serve as a deterrent for environmental damage and degradation.

The money paid by offenders is collected into funds - federally, this is the Environmental Damages Fund (EDF) and provincially, this is the Ontario Community Environment Fund (OCEF). Both of these funds collect the money that individuals or corporations pay for their violations and then provide funding to initiatives that will benefit the environment. Learn more in this [recent blog post](#).

CELA has produced [fact sheets](#) about the availability of funds at both the federal and provincial levels through the EDF and OCEF, respectively. Each fact sheet contains information about where funding comes from, eligible projects, who is eligible to apply, and how to apply for funding.

Healthy Environments for Learning Day

Thursday, April 24th

The 2025 Healthy Environments for Learning Day campaign focuses on extreme heat in schools and child care environments in Canada. Extreme heat poses significant health risks for children and staff working in learning environments. [Learn more](#) about the impacts of extreme heat and advocate for the protection of all children in Canada.

CELA is proud to be a founding member of the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment (CPCHE, 'kip-chee'), a national collaboration of organizations with overlapping missions that have been working together since 2001 to improve children's environmental health in Canada. Healthy Environments for Learning Day is a key initiative of CPCHE.

Webinar - Beat the Heat! Fighting for Cool Communities

Tuesday, April 15th, 2025
7:00pm ET

Heat waves and extreme heat are a growing threat and a deadly one. Many Ontario organizations have been raising the alarm and campaigning for changes to protect seniors, tenants, workers, and children.

For the last year, SCAN! has convened meetings of the Heat Collaborative, which promotes information-sharing, support and coordination among these organizations. The collaborative is hosting a webinar to showcase the work of several of these groups, and to learn how heat impacts their members and communities, how they've been campaigning on the issue, and what they are planning for the upcoming heat season.

Speakers will include: Jennifer Penney from SCAN!; Laura Walton, President of the Ontario Federation of Labour; Flora Aldridge from the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment, and Jacqueline Wilson from the CELA.

[Registration is required](#) for this free webinar.



Photo Credit: Theresa McClenaghan and April Wepler

Anishinabek Nation Water Consortium

CELA staff members Theresa McClenaghan and April Wepler were honoured to attend Anishinabek Nation's first annual Water Consortium, which took place in Little Current on March 18-19. With a theme of "Great Lakes Gathering for the Sake of Water", the conference featured a range of Indigenous and government presenters.

The first day of the conference focused on "The Past - Traditional Teachings and Water", and included a water ceremony and topics such as the personhood of water, the language of water, healing our waters, and honouring water walks. The second day focused on "The Present and Future of Our Waters" and included presentations on educational resources and storytelling, water governance, Indigenous law and water ethics, and community-based monitoring for contaminants in fish and water. There was also a government and First Nations roundtable, and a presentation from the International Joint Commission.

CELA was grateful for the opportunity to attend and present, and looks forward to future consortiums.

From the Foundation

March Feature

This month's feature from the [Canadian Environmental Law Foundation](#) is a 1987 report by former CELA researcher Kathy Cooper.

Titled "**Lead and Public Health: Risk Reducing Lifestyle Choices**", the paper was written for the Ontario Public Health Association's 28th annual meeting and concluded that lead is a serious issue of environmental and public health. It stated that the level of environmental lead contamination and average blood-lead levels in Canadian children required both swift regulatory action and greater awareness in the general population of who is at risk, how and where they are exposed, and practical information about how exposure can be avoided.

Support Our Work

Are you interested in supporting CELA's work?

The Canadian Environmental Law Foundation supports CELA's work on environmental law and justice issues.

A tax-creditable donation to the Foundation ensures that CELA can continue to provide research and educational support for environmental law reform, and legal assistance to low-income communities who are adversely – and disproportionately – affected by environmental issues.

By making a [one-time gift or becoming a monthly donor](#), you can help ensure access to environmental justice in Ontario.

In addition to supporting CELA, one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Foundation was a desire to protect and document the history of environmental law and environmental decision-making.

A key initiative of the Foundation is the Canadian Environmental Law Collections, an extensive library of online and printed resources that document Canada's environmental law and policy history.

As we have seen in recent months south of the border, valuable information on pollution and environmental law can be destroyed or withheld from the public by unsympathetic governments.

Your [support helps ensure](#) we can all have access to the history of environmental law for generations to come.

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