

Frank Lagunas: Dedicated to Keeping America's Water Safe

Since 2011, Frank Lagunas has served as an EPA water quality scientist and lab certification specialist, overseeing 30 labs and working with Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin and tribal nations in the Midwest to ensure Americans enjoy clean, safe water. He also serves as a Steward for AFGE Local 704.

Sadly, working at the EPA is a fact Frank keeps close to his vest as the Agency is under attack from EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and from Americans who misunderstand the vital work that dedicated EPA employees do every day to protect our air, water, land and endangered species.

“The EPA is hemorrhaging scientists due to the current administration trying to erase scientific facts and data from our environment, and that puts our core mission to put public health first at risk. America needs to know that EPA scientists, engineers and workforce are the fabric of our country. They are public servants on a personal and professional mission at the EPA to protect human health as our infrastructure crumbles, budgets are removed, and the workforce declines.”

The Flint Water Crisis

Lead seepage into the drinking water in Flint, Mich. caused a massive public health crisis beginning in 2014. Frank was part of the first-responder EPA team called in when the water crisis started.

The problem began when the city switched its water supply in 2014. Almost immediately, residents of Flint — a majority-black city where 40 percent of people live in poverty — started complaining about the quality of the water. City and state officials denied for months that there was a serious problem.

By that time, supply pipes had sustained major corrosion and lead was leaching into the water. The city switched back to its original water supply in 2015, but it was too late to reverse the damage to the pipes.

Ask anyone in Flint and they will tell you that the water crisis there resulted in a 31 percent increase in miscarriages, deformities and growth stunt in children, and developmental delay in learning. To this day, the people of Flint are still on filtered and bottled water.

Testing in schools and communities nationwide continues to find lead in water. In addition, the Lead and Copper Rule, which regulates lead in the water and is part of the Safe Drinking Water Act, was one of 1,579 rules, guidance documents or paperwork requirements that were canceled or delayed in the first 11 months of the Trump administration.

For those attempting to control pH levels in water supplies, testing is merely a snapshot in time. What looks good one minute can be sullied the next. There are few options. Lead pipes can be protected with an interior ortho-phosphate barrier, but when disturbed, the protective crust flakes off and water levels spike with lead. No one knows the length of time needed to remediate, and that's why Frank's job is so critical.

The Future is Dire

Frank believes the future is dire. Every single municipality is already, or soon will be, suffering increasing levels of lead as our aging infrastructure continues to deteriorate. Communities in rural America are cash strapped without funding for maintenance and operation of water treatment plants. This means that the most underprivileged in America will suffer greatly.

"I want America to know how seriously I take my job. My heart bleeds knowing that we no longer have the staffing and budget to protect the children from water contaminants. In cities throughout America from the smallest to largest, we will see lead creep into the water supply and affect public health. It's inevitable.

"Very soon, the politicians who are in denial will feel the effects and see the devastation of their ignorance of climate science. It doesn't matter what color your skin is or what political party you belong to; everyone drinks water, everyone breathes air, and everyone suffers the effects of Mother Nature and man-made crises. Although our morale is low and the EPA is being demolished, I took an oath to protect America's health as a public servant. I will continue until they tell me to stay home."