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Chair

The Honourable Judy A. Sgro

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I'm calling to order the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, meeting number 63, pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, February 7, 2017, to study water quality.

We have a variety of witnesses here from both the Department of Health and the Office of Infrastructure of Canada, as well as Bob Bratina who moved the motion that was referred to the House.

I will turn it over to the Office of Infrastructure of Canada, please.

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): Good morning. I'm Alain Desruisseaux, acting assistant deputy minister, policy, Infrastructure Canada. I'm here with Laura Di Paolo, who is the director general responsible for program operations and integration.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. I would like to commend the committee for its important work in reviewing this motion.

Access to clean water is key to the overall success of our communities and for the health and safety of future generations of Canadians.

Modern and effective water and waste-water infrastructure provides clean, safe water for our children to drink and ensures that our communities remain healthy and strong.

[Translation]

Canada's water is a precious resource that deserves protection and careful stewardship.

That is why, under most of Infrastructure Canada's current programs, drinking water infrastructure—including replacing or upgrading publicly-owned drinking water transmission pipes—has been an eligible category of investment.

[English]

That is also why the Government of Canada introduced a \$2-billion clean water and waste-water fund in budget 2016.

This funding is focused on the repair and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure assets and is designed to support municipalities, provinces, and territories in their efforts to modernize and extend the life of their water and waste-water systems.

To advance Canada's efforts to build a clean economy, budget 2017 laid out a plan to invest \$21.9 billion in green infrastructure. Of that amount, \$9.2 billion will be provided to provinces and territories to support projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, deliver clean water, and safely manage waste water, among other projects.

[Translation]

The government will also provide \$4 billion from the green and social funding streams for infrastructure in indigenous communities, to build and improve housing, water treatment systems, health facilities and other community infrastructure.

As you know, the vast majority of core public infrastructure in Canada is owned by the provinces, territories, and municipalities.

Each order of government, including the provinces, territories, and municipalities, has an important role to play with respect to the protection of water in Canada.

• (1105)

[English]

Local decision-makers who know what's best for their communities are responsible for identifying projects to the provinces and territories which in turn prioritize and submit projects to Infrastructure Canada.

As I mentioned, the department has several funding streams through which projects for water and waste-water public infrastructure can receive support, and that includes the federal gas tax fund and the new building Canada fund.

Since 2002, Infrastructure Canada has supported more than 6,000 drinking water projects across the country through the federal gas tax fund and other contribution programs. Our investments in these projects total more than \$3.5 billion.

[Translation]

The Government of Canada is committed to supporting provincial, territorial, and municipal priorities, including investing in water and wastewater projects that will contribute to the health and safety of Canadians.

Through the government's investing in Canada plan, more than \$180 billion in federal funding will be provided to important public infrastructure projects, including water and wastewater projects.

[English]

Through Infrastructure Canada's funding programs, the department is helping to build strong, sustainable, and inclusive cities and communities, where Canadians want to live.

Thanks for inviting me to speak with you today about the important work Infrastructure Canada is doing on behalf of Canadians.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Carreau, from the Department of Health, do you have any opening remarks that you want to make?

Mr. Greg Carreau (Director, Water and Air Quality Bureau, Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch, Department of Health): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm Greg Carreau, director of the water and air quality bureau at Health Canada. I'm here today with my colleagues, Véronique Morisset and Scott Hancock. I don't have any formal opening remarks to make. I would just like to take a minute to thank you for inviting Health Canada to participate in this very important discussion.

My department has an extensive history in assessing and managing the human health effects of lead, notably with respect to drinking water, and we work very closely with the provinces and territories on developing guidelines for Canadian drinking water quality. These drinking water quality standards are used by federal, provincial, and territorial agencies as a basis to establish their own regulatory requirements for drinking water quality. As you may be aware, we're working very closely with our colleagues on the federal, provincial, and territorial committee on drinking water to strengthen the guideline on lead. It was updated in 1992, but we are now updating it to reflect more up-to-date scientific and technological advancements.

I look forward to the discussion today and welcome any comments or questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rayes, you have six minutes.

Welcome to our new members who are joining us today, as well as Mr. Bratina.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Yes, the new team.

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning. My thanks to the witnesses for coming here.

My first question is for either Health Canada or the Office of Infrastructure of Canada.

Is there a complete inventory of the water pipes that might contain lead here in Canada?

[English]

Mr. Greg Carreau: Thank you very much for the question. From Health Canada's perspective, we do not have a comprehensive inventory currently of all lead service lines that may exist across Canada. Of course, we are aware that lead has been used historically in infrastructure for drinking water across Canada, but to date, we're unaware of a comprehensive inventory in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I would like to hear what the officials from the Office of Infrastructure of Canada have to say about this.

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: We do not have an exhaustive list. We rely on our partners, basically the provinces and the municipalities, who are responsible for assessing the needs. As I mentioned, we rely on our partners to prioritize the projects themselves.

In terms of specific information the provinces and municipalities have, I guess it varies.

• (1110)

Mr. Alain Rayes: I'm surprised. I was honestly expecting to hear that a national database had been created for that purpose, especially since you say that you work closely with the provinces and, in turn, with the municipalities, I imagine. God knows that this is a serious problem for municipalities. This is the case in many parts of Canada.

Would it not be wise to have such a database?

The government wants to implement programs. It chooses the ones in which it wants to invest money; so it sets priorities.

When it develops its budget, how does it decide to prioritize water quality, for example, in infrastructure programs, and to allow work to be done on the pipes?

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: This is really the responsibility of the provinces and the municipalities. At the Office of Infrastructure of Canada, we ensure that the priorities of the provinces are aligned with those identified by the Government of Canada and that the projects are in line with the terms and conditions of the programs.

In terms of the assessment of specific needs, we rely on the provinces and the municipalities.

Mr. Alain Rayes: In my opinion, if you rely on the municipalities and they have access to those data, it should not be so complicated—with two territories and 10 provinces—to compile that information in a database in order to be able to monitor the situation. As a result, the government or the department responsible for infrastructure could have a longer-term perspective and a clearer idea of the time required to address the problem across Canada. Honestly, your answer really surprises me.

The infrastructure bank is a topic much debated in the House of Commons. We hear that the bank is going to have \$35 billion for projects.

Are the projects related to drinking water and the replacement of water mains among the priorities of the Office of Infrastructure of Canada?

Could municipalities get funding for this through the infrastructure bank?

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: It is difficult to elaborate on the bank, which has not yet been created. So the eligibility of the projects remains to be confirmed, but the ones you are talking about represent significant investments. They will require a risk transfer and they are fairly complex. We are thinking of cross-border projects, that is to say needing cooperation between provinces.

As to whether water projects might be eligible, it is a little early for me to give you a clear answer. However, that is not the type of project that the bank will most likely support.

I should point out that, in terms of long-term investments, we are working closely with Statistics Canada and our municipal and federal partners to gather more asset management data.

[English]

Asset management has been identified as a key pillar, moving forward with the long-term plan, and it's a key gap. We need to collect more data, and that points to water as well.

It's a point well taken. We have to collect more information. That points to the water networks in Canada, but also points to all categories of assets. This has been identified as a gap we need to address, and this is a key priority for the Government of Canada moving forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I encourage you to—

[English]

The Chair: Make it just a short question.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes. This is just a comment.

I encourage you to go through the exercise with a number of the elected officials here. I can confirm that all municipalities have access to those data. At any rate, the vast majority have access to them.

In order for the government to make decisions, regardless of the party in power, the department should have access to that information to be able to make forecasts. I bring it back to the budget exercise. I think it would make us a little less cynical in the way we see things.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Rayes.

Mr. Iacono.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Chair, please note that I will be sharing my time with Mr. Bratina.

I have a quick question.

We know full well that the municipalities, and sometimes the provinces, are responsible for water pipes. What role can Canada play in ensuring that Canadians have access to safe drinking water?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo (Director General, Program Integration, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): On the federal side, we can fund a number of projects. We tend to fund public infrastructure

projects to produce safe drinking water and build drinking water pipes.

As far as we are concerned, the issue is more with the pipes that go to the houses, which are considered private property. So we do not fund those projects. Our role is really to ensure that funding is available for public infrastructure projects that serve to provide drinking water to Canadians.

• (1115)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Bratina.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thank you.

On this subject, you should know that starting in 2007, when I was on Hamilton council and subsequently mayor, we found to our surprise that we had lead exceedances. Even up until today we're still working on the problem, and we will be putting in a facility to put orthophosphate into the water system of Hamilton, which will mitigate the effects of all of the lead pipes, whether on private property or still old public mains.

I want to first of all go to the point that local decision-makers know best. The Department of National Defence just had an exceedance, from April 27, 2017, to May 8, 2017. You couldn't drink the water in the old Nortel building. One of the comments was that it didn't really matter, because that's something that only affects you over years and years of ingesting. I don't believe that Health Canada would agree totally with that statement.

Second, I want to emphasize in my question to the group the seriousness of lead exposure as it has more recently been discovered, with research such as what I'm looking at here, which is a March 2017 story in *The Washington Post*. It's about a survey of children with elevated blood lead levels at age 11, checked years later. This was a New Zealand study. They found that there was a direct and indisputable association with children's IQs. Lead damages brain health—we know it does—and public officials said there is no safe level of lead in a child's blood.

I'll address a question first of all to Health Canada. Do you feel that other jurisdictions, municipalities, provinces, and so on, are aware of current research indicating a more serious problem with lead than was previously supposed?

Mr. Greg Carreau: Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned at the outset, we do work very closely with provinces and territories on the implementation of drinking water quality standards. Recently we have been working with the provinces and territories very closely on the issue of lead. We have updated our drinking water quality guidelines in a proposed format which encompasses the very data you're speaking of, in terms of new data showing effects particularly with young infants.

Through our ongoing dialogue with the provinces and territories, we have been discussing this new science. We have put it in a format in our new drinking water quality guidelines which reduces the suggested limit. From our perspective, we believe we have been communicating the up-to-date science with the provinces and territories with respect to impacts on the IQ for infants.

Mr. Bob Bratina: I could give you other bits of evidence by people in control of municipal water supplies who say, “Well, it takes years. You’ll never get sick from that.” I do think there’s an educational process needed.

However, on the private part—and I know I’m close to my time—one of the things we developed in the City of Hamilton, and other cities, Ottawa, Guelph, and London, was a lone program for people with marginal incomes who lived in old houses with lead pipe service lines. They could borrow the money and pay it back on their water bill over 10 years.

Hamilton has cuts in the asphalt all over the older parts of the city; I believe we do something like 500 of those a year. Would Infrastructure Canada consider supporting these kinds of programs in a municipality?

I was struck by the phrase “local decision-makers...know what’s best”. We have absolutely positive results in our city with this program. Every year, more service lines are taken out, the money is returned, and it keeps going. The City of Toronto turned it down. I have a copy of the council meeting where the mayor said, “I have trouble buying it because I’ve just seen too many fiascos come out of this place.”

I don’t think that was the best decision. I would like to ask if you would consider that a portion of the infrastructure money be allowed to be used by cities for a program like that. Do you think that would find compliance within your world?

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bratina.

I’m going to have ask, if you can find an opportunity, to answer that question at another point in the meeting, or when one of our members has the floor.

Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us this morning.

I was also surprised to learn that this record, this inventory of the situation does not exist at the federal level. I will try to understand the extent by asking questions that are more relevant to your area of expertise.

If there’s no inventory, do you have an idea of the yearly number of projects or the amounts invested in projects that directly affect water quality?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: I do not have the yearly numbers, but—

Mr. Robert Aubin: Could you give me an idea?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: As my colleague said earlier, from 2002 to date, we have funded more than 6,000 projects across the country, amounting to \$3.5 billion. Just recently, we got the figures for drinking water programs, which were funded in phase 1 of our new plan. We have funded 805 projects in the last 18 months, totalling \$966 million.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Would it be completely wrong to set an average, or are projects of more or less the same value ?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: No, they are not.

In fact, there are a variety of projects. We may fund the installation of pipes as well as the entire construction of a water treatment plant.

Mr. Robert Aubin: So what would be the smallest and biggest project in terms of costs? Is it a few hundred or a few tens of thousands of dollars?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: It can range from hundreds of thousands of dollars to millions of dollars.

Mr. Robert Aubin: There are no projects that cost hundreds of millions of dollars?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: I’ll have to check that, but the cost of water treatment plant projects is typically between \$5 million and \$25 million.

Mr. Robert Aubin: In phase 2 of the federal infrastructure plan, will there be specific funding earmarked for this issue, or are related projects eligible, as was previously the case?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: Yes, there is funding. Municipalities and provinces are still being asked to prioritize their projects. Funding is available, but it is clear that there is an environmental quality component to fund this type of project.

Mr. Robert Aubin: On a number of occasions, cities like Ottawa and Hamilton have supported their residents financially and modernized their lead pipes through interest-free loan programs, for example. Is this an avenue that the federal government might consider, whether by providing interest-free loans or tax deductions that would allow citizens to absorb some of the costs, which are fairly significant?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: On our side, I think these programs are very good and can have a big impact, as Mr. Bratina said. However, public infrastructure falls under the federal mandate. That would go beyond our mandate.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Do you want to add something, Mr. Desruisseaux?

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: I would like to add that the partnership we have established with the provinces and municipalities is working very well. We have held a lot of consultations, there have been a lot of engagement activities to design phase 2 of the federal infrastructure plan. This aspect was not mentioned by our partners—including our municipal partners—as an investment priority for the federal government.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you very much.

My next question is for the officials from Health Canada.

In your opening remarks, you mentioned the last update on the health standard—I think we can call it that—which was in 1992. If my knowledge of the matter is accurate, the effects of lead on the body are cumulative. Even if we drink high-quality drinking water for several years, we would still carry our bad drinks and, if we started again, it would add up.

Is there a date set for reviewing this standard? Do you think the 1992 standard is still adequate or should it be revised?

• (1125)

Ms. Véronique Morisset (Manager, Water Quality Program Division, Water and Air Quality Bureau, Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch, Department of Health): The Health Canada standard, which was established a long time ago, has been revised. In the last few years, there have been other revisions. There have been reports, such as the “Final Human Health State of the Science Report on Lead”, which has new scientific data that we have used. We made a new recommendation and published it for public consultation in the past year. We are in the process of finalizing it with the provinces. So there should be a new recommendation for drinking water quality in Canada. It should be available by about next year.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

What prompts the revision of the standard? Is it cyclical? For example, is it every five years or every 10 years, or is it revised when the scientific community reports something new?

Ms. Véronique Morisset: We rely on a number of criteria. It may be as a result of scientific advances, of course, but also if the provinces or territories express some needs. They are at the table to help us set priorities when we review the recommendations.

Mr. Robert Aubin: As I understand it, Health Canada does not have to review the standard on a regular basis.

Ms. Véronique Morisset: No, there is no such obligation.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Aubin.

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, all of you, for being here.

I want to get back to Mr. Bratina's question. I'm looking for an answer. Let's say the municipalities approached Infrastructure Canada and the rather large amounts of money that are available to it now. If they said that they wanted to set up a loans program or something that would help replace those main service to household lines, is that the kind of request Infrastructure Canada would entertain?

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: The focus is really on public infrastructure. This is something that we would morally encourage, but this is not a project that could be funded through the infrastructure funding.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Are there other sources of funding available, say, through the gas tax or the building Canada fund?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: The projects that would be inclusive of the main conduits would be eligible for funding under our programs. Where we draw the line between public and private infrastructure is for the lines that go directly into the homes. That's where those loan replacement programs are extremely helpful.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We're looking for money to support that, so what rock do we turn over to find the money?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: I think that would be part of the study, if the committee chooses to go forward with the study, to determine where the proper sources of funding would be.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay, good. Thank you for that. I need to move on.

Mr. Carreau and group, at Health Canada you've recognized there has been an issue for a long time. Are you really powerless to mandate action on this?

Mr. Greg Carreau: The implementation of our guidelines is a provincial and territorial responsibility, so we work very closely with them to transmit the current science, and particularly in this case, with lead-set numerical values for our guidelines, in consultation with provinces and territories and stakeholders, and then we look to the provinces and territories to implement these guidelines.

You can appreciate the diversity of the drinking water circumstances, whether they're using groundwater, surface water, or—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Sure, I understand that, but I was looking for the mechanism.

Mr. Greg Carreau: The provinces and territories have the mandate.

Mr. Ken Hardie: It's the priority coming up from the local authorities and not down from the federal government.

Mr. Greg Carreau: That's correct. We don't have the mandate to enforce them by legislation.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Was it the same with asbestos?

Mr. Greg Carreau: I can't speak to asbestos.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay.

If new maximum allowable concentrations are being contemplated, does that open Pandora's box on this thing even wider? I'm thinking particularly of copper piping, which used to be the standard, but soldered with lead solder.

Would we now be looking at a whole new galaxy of replacement problems if that new standard came in?

• (1130)

Mr. Greg Carreau: Specific to lead?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes.

Mr. Greg Carreau: Yes, we understand there are some challenges with regard to implementing the new lead guideline as it moves forward. We understand that the majority of the sources are in the household, through brass fittings or solderings or the lead service lines that we've been speaking about today. Certainly there are some challenges in implementing it.

We are working with the provinces and territories to implement the new guideline that would recommend sampling at the tap of a residence to get a better and more comprehensive inventory of lead concentrations in residences across Canada, but the provinces and territories will ultimately be responsible for the implementation of these guidelines.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Is it fair to say that if we go to the more stringent limit, we don't really know what the implications are and we'd have to do some testing in the various scenarios?

Mr. Greg Carreau: Yes, we have a sense of the impact and we've been working in the provinces and territories that have a much better sense, obviously. Yes, the sampling at the tap that is proposed in the new guidelines will give a much better indication.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We've been focusing, of course, on the supply lines coming in from the main feeder to the house. What about the drainage systems? Are there long-term macro-environmental issues if we're using lead pipe to take the drainage away from the house? Is there contamination to any degree going back into the environment at large?

Mr. Greg Carreau: Obviously, our mandate is to protect human health from drinking water with lead. It's beyond our expertise to look at the environmental exposure of the lead in the drainage system.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I know this isn't a fair question, but I'll ask it anyway. Do you wish you had a little more clout to make things happen?

Mr. Greg Carreau: It's beyond my responsibilities.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I know. That was a very mean question, and I'm politically corrupt.

Mr. Greg Carreau: No, I'm good.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

What I'm going to try to do is get to the next step on some of the things we can actually do at this level of government. Also, I have to agree with Mr. Rayes' comments with respect to the inventory. I do recognize that, at least in the province of Ontario, there is the Public Sector Accounting Board, which strongly encourages, almost enforces, municipalities to put their assets in order. It recognizes what those assets are per municipality and then attaches asset management plans to them to ensure that the municipalities recognize the investments that have to be made in those assets, such as water and waste water, and water and waste-water pipes, especially those that are lead-based. I'll say et cetera, because there are a lot of other materials attached to that besides just the pipes, as Mr. Hardie alluded to.

I'll preface my comments also by saying that municipalities recognize that the gas tax funding is in place and that today they can use that gas tax funding for pretty well anything. That goes to Mr. Hardie's question about lead pipes. Municipalities can, in fact, put programs in place to deal with laterals from the property line to the homes. Whether it's through a loan repayment program or a straight-out grant, they have that ability. Whether they do it or not is up to them.

The second part of it is the building Canada fund. It's the same thing. They can make an application for those for infrastructure. They can, in fact, put programs in place, whether it's a loan program or an outright grant to individual households. The reality, however, especially in cities the size of Hamilton, is that it's just not financially doable because the cost can be quite high.

With that, there are residual benefits we recognize that can actually accrue, over time, operational savings to start programs like that at the municipal level, such as lower development charges. The private sector can then take the money and put in those programs. It's obviously lowering property taxes and water and waste-water repair rates. There are residual benefits attached to funding that comes from the federal level besides the obvious.

Last, with regard to sustainable budgeting, when it comes to community improvement and growth plan budgeting, it allows councils on a yearly basis to simply move forward with it. They don't have to debate it. It was already debated years prior through their asset management strategies.

The question I have is strictly with earmarking, although it's up to municipalities and FCM. We can't forget about our partners at FCM because a lot of programs funnel through them. It's sort of moving forward with, as Mr. Rayes stated, data, making an inventory—such as in Ontario through the PSAB program—of lead pipes, etc., and attached to it, asset management costs.

Do you think there's an opportunity for the federal government to recognize what the costs are and, therefore, what programs should be sustainable? Is there an opportunity for it to work with the provinces and municipalities to actually have a database in place to encourage that discipline at the municipal level, to drive the dollars to and from the federal level, as well as to recognize how many dollars are actually needed to fund those varied programs, especially with what I am sure are some concerns from Health Canada?

• (1135)

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: Thank you for your question and for your comments earlier.

The federal government has established with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities a \$50-million asset management program that was launched in May. Now municipalities have access to direct funding to help them develop their asset management plans. They also will be doing a lot of capacity building, offering training and workshops to help municipalities understand better what they need to be able to better manage their assets, including water and wastewater assets.

In addition to that, the FCM will also be doing a lot of awareness raising with local city councillors and local administrators. It's great to have a plan, but if it's not recognized at the city council table and not used as part of the decision-making, the plan kind of sits on the shelf. I think the local awareness raising that the FCM will be doing around asset management and its importance will really go a long way in helping us move the bar on asset management planning. Then that would feed into the data and the Canadian public infrastructure survey we will be launching with Statistics Canada later this summer so that we can actually start to collect that information in a more comprehensive way.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Having said that, are those programs in place?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: Yes.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Of course, although they can be topped up, and we understand that, provinces like Ontario do have databases in place that do show those costs—

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: Yes.

Mr. Vance Badawey: —that we're all talking about, although provinces are remiss sometimes in attaching a bit more discipline and/or their involvement with lead-based contaminants, whether pipes, ground, etc. I recognized that in my past life.

There may be an opportunity for the feds to give them a little push in that respect, but the last part is, we're starting a process right now with the smart cities community improvement growth plan process that will recognize and work with provinces and municipalities to put in place strategies to fund projects like this to ensure that they have, within their growth improvement plans, these kinds of challenges.

Do you find that it's advantageous to do that, to go down that road, and ultimately to put a sustainable funding envelope in place that will look at improvement growth plans that include fixing or updating piping that contains lead?

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: Well, this is definitely something we would look at in more detail. I think this is a key area of interest. Everything comes back to collaboration between the different orders of government. I come back to asset management. It's moving forward with more data. We are aware of incomparable data so that we can make sure, working with the provinces, that there's an accurate prioritization that aligns with the needs.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I have to interrupt. I don't want to take someone else's time. Maybe you can finish that comment later.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's very interesting to be a part of this discussion, but I just want to ask Infrastructure Canada and Health Canada a question.

I'm from rural Alberta, and I know many of us here speak with our municipalities on a regular basis, but in all honesty, this has never arisen as a priority with my municipalities, and I'm just curious. Is this more of an urban municipal issue? Is it more in eastern Canada than in the west, because we're not as old as eastern Canada? Is this more of a larger urban issue with the lead pipes in the water systems and not so much in the smaller communities?

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: I don't have that information, unfortunately.

● (1140)

Mr. John Barlow: Okay.

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: On the distribution of projects, there's a wide variety of projects and areas. It's not only urban, but I don't have precise statistics.

Mr. John Barlow: Right.

I know many of my colleagues have touched on this already, the lack of inventory available and trying to resolve the scope of this issue, and if there's something we can do about it. From this discussion today, is the idea to move forward and start to collect that data? Do we see that as an opportunity to fill in some of those gaps and have discussions with municipalities and provinces to try to put together a database on where we stand with that?

The reason I ask that is, if it isn't just an urban issue.... I have a riding of 25,000 square kilometres that has a great deal of irrigation pipelines and water wells. Very few would have an urban water system. I just can't imagine how difficult that would be to try to collect that data, but is that something you're willing and able to do?

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: The answer is yes. As Laura pointed out, I think our role is really to make sure that we can assist our partners in their own areas of accountability to develop the capacity of getting there, so making sure that there's more of a capacity to refine the asset management, and overall, we have access to better quality data that is ultimately nationally comparable so that we can have a better assessment of what is going on from the national perspective. That's what the Canada core public infrastructure survey we're developing with Stats Canada will assess over time.

That's one of our key goals.

Mr. John Barlow: In realizing that, is there some consistency in terms of provinces and municipalities maintaining that data and some of the regulations that they have in terms of their water systems? I'm assuming there was a time when the federal government stepped in and said from that point on.... Was there legislation in terms of a date, in terms of no longer being able to use lead pipes for water distribution? Was that a federal mandate? Do we know how far back we're going?

Ms. Véronique Morisset: What's allowed in a treatment system is based on the plumbing code. There's a national plumbing code of Canada that establishes things, but then each province and in some cases a municipality will adopt their own version of the plumbing code. We can tell until when lead could be used in pipes, for example, but we don't know after that when it would have been adopted by the provinces. The dates are a bit too hard to come by and it really depends on the province.

Mr. John Barlow: In saying that, with the provinces there could be some real inconsistencies on the dates when they actually started, with a new subdivision or something like that.

Ms. Véronique Morisset: There could be. It really depends on the age of the municipality. It may not necessarily be an urban problem or a rural problem. It really is a question of when the system was built.

Mr. John Barlow: Could you have gaps between not only when the federal regulations came in but when the provinces enacted them and also when municipalities enacted them?

Ms. Véronique Morisset: I imagine so. It's not as if each province adopts their own version of the plumbing code. In some cases, it is large municipalities that adopt their own version of the plumbing code. It's really a little more complicated.

Mr. John Barlow: So your best efforts to try to have a uniform system don't always work. That's fair.

It may be an unfair question on the federal level, but again, the bulk of my riding is rural, with very small villages, lots of acreages and farms. A lot of them have communal water systems where they may have one or two wells, and pipes go out from there. I assume that would be difficult data to try to track down in terms of what they were using.

Mr. Greg Carreau: It may be, you're right.

As I mentioned, in our new guidelines we're advocating for and suggesting sampling at the tap, so you'd get a sense of the lead levels at the tap. Then you could do further investigations, if you're finding lead, to find out if it's a service line issue, brass fittings, soldering, etc. From a Health Canada perspective, that's the first step in identifying potential issues across Canada.

• (1145)

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sikand.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Madam Chair, I'd like to give all of my time to Mr. Bratina please.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Well, thank you.

I'm really pleased with the discussion. I understand Mr. Barlow's question about rural versus urban, but any house that was built after 1880 and before 1978 probably has a lead service line in it, whether it's out in the country or not. The national regulation, the standard changed in 1978 to a large extent, and then further past that, the regulations with regard to lead solder and so on changed, so pretty much from 1990 and beyond you're in the safe zone.

I want to bring the conversation back to the importance of this, because as we're hearing and as Mr. Barlow said, and it was a fair comment, we never heard about this. This is an 84-page study from the City of Hamilton with regard to orthophosphate. It's a complete survey of all of the issues that we're talking about here. They're not commonly known, even by operators of water systems in various communities across Canada. I did a survey of them.

Then there's Flint, Michigan. Flint, Michigan sued the EPA, a federal regulatory authority, for \$700 million, because they showed no leadership in dealing with the problem that suddenly occurred in Flint, Michigan, because they changed the water source.

One of the reasons I brought this private member's motion forward is to ask Health Canada and Infrastructure Canada to come to a new understanding together that is not based on the old mandate that while it's on private property it has nothing to do with us.

Madam Chair, I'll get to my question, but it needs a preamble.

The most vulnerable people on this issue are families with young children living in old houses. It's very typical. I live in a neighbourhood that's well over 100 years old. Young families are moving in. I ask them, "Do you know whether you have a lead pipe or not? No? Well, the city has a program." Sure enough, they cut the thing out. These people may not have the financial ability, even on discovering that, to do anything about it unless there's a loan program, as an example.

The question I'm going to put to you again has been asked twice already. Would you consider looking at the parameters of infrastructure investment that might allow municipalities to access infrastructure money to get 500 service lines out per year, as they're doing in Hamilton? In Toronto they extrapolated a much bigger number, but the City of Toronto said, "No, we don't want to do that. It's a fiasco."

I think it behooves us, as a federal government. I'm asking you, would you consider the possibility that municipalities could use some of the money that's available to modernize infrastructure, for infrastructure that's on private property? The money is not given away. It's just loaned, and it circulates. Is that a fair question? Would you be able to bring that back to other people and ask them that question?

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: I'll start by providing you with the answer you don't want to hear. Homeowners are responsible for the portion of the connections that are located on their properties.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Right.

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: We will consider the outcomes of your study. Obviously, we will consider any advice you will provide.

Mr. Bob Bratina: We get back to the seriousness of the problem.

As Mr. Barlow suggested, Who knew this was a problem? We have these studies over 30 or 40 years. There was a famous one in Cincinnati that tracked children from very poor areas. They found out in the Ohio penal system that something like half or more of the inmates had high lead exceedance in their bodies.

The most amazing graph of all is the the graph that shows a parallel between diminishing criminal behaviour and the removal of lead from gasoline. People are still wondering why—and you can look at any statistic you would like—crime rates are going down and have been going down steadily over many decades. Guess what? It's a parallel.

We know now, from brain imaging of infants, that lead in a very young, developing child will affect the prefrontal lobe of their brain, which affects the humanistic aspects of behaviour. I would like to hear once again from Health Canada whether—

• (1150)

The Chair: You'll have to close off, Mr. Bratina, if you want to give them some time to answer. You have 15 seconds left.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Would you agree that it's more serious than we thought some time ago, based on new research?

Mr. Greg Carreau: Yes, I think from the Department of Health's perspective, the new research that's come about in the early to mid-2000s suggests more of a human health effect than was previously known in the 1990s and previous to that, so we would agree with that.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lauzon.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome to our witnesses.

I am very pleased that you are here this morning.

[English]

This is my first visit to this committee, and what an interesting topic we have here. I feel very uninformed, though.

There are a couple of things. I guess sometimes when you look at something fresh, you see things that maybe stand out. One of the things that blew me away is that we're talking about this problem with lead pipes, and we don't know how big or how small the problem is. There's no inventory of the issue. I wonder, just as a novice, maybe we should step back and say that if we're going to address this problem, we should know what it is and how bad it is. That's just a comment I'd like to make.

The other thing is budgeting. There's really no idea about the budgeting. I guess it depends on how much the province or the municipalities ask for. It goes up and then you, at the federal level, will decide what programs are worthy or not. I think if you had the inventory, then you could look after the budgeting, and we could

attack this issue. What I'm saying is that there's no strategic plan here.

As Mr. Bratina said, there seems to be a very serious issue. I have infant grandkids. We need to eradicate this problem. Time is of the essence. We should be, first of all, making an inventory of all the problems, and then deciding how much of a budget we need to address them and develop a strategic plan to look after them.

Having said that, one thing comes to my mind. I represent the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, which borders the St. Lawrence River. I have a municipality of 45,000 people in Cornwall, who access the water from the St. Lawrence River. It's filtered, of course, and distributed to them. Actually, they distribute it to parts of the rural area as well. The St. Lawrence River has a high incidence of lead in it. Now, does the filtration system remove the lead from the water that they take in? The lead is so bad that some of the fish can't be eaten. When you take the water in and you put it through the filtration plant, is the product that comes out the other end lead-free? Health Canada might be able to answer this. Does anyone know that, or could you answer that?

Ms. Véronique Morisset: The focus we've had in establishing our guideline is the main source of lead, which is through the infrastructure, so the point was really more looking at it from making sure that the water is non-corrosive.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Actually, with all due respect, the St. Lawrence River Institute says not to eat the fish because there's too much lead in it, so obviously the water in the St. Lawrence River has too much lead in it.

Ms. Véronique Morisset: The issues with fish are different because fish are in the water 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's often the environmental guidelines end up being lower than the health effects guidelines. At the same time, if you have a conventional water treatment plant, it will remove some of the lead, yes.

• (1155)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: It will remove the lead because it is an up-to-date test system, so that's good.

Ms. Véronique Morisset: Yes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: On health standards, for example, if I live in a certain community and there's lead in the pipes that service my home, even if I correct the situation on my property, if there's a lead pipe carrying it down the street, does somebody have requirements that it has to be removed, or does something have to be at a certain level where that is not acceptable?

Mr. Greg Carreau: Yes, that would be the municipality's responsibility. Our understanding is the majority of the lead exposure is via the lead service lines that are on private properties, as well as the lead exposure from private-residence property. As I mentioned at the outset, we've been working very closely with provinces and territories about lead in drinking water. By and large, the lead pipes in the lead service lines you're speaking of—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Just so I understand correctly you said that most of the lead is coming from the pipes that are going into the homes, not necessarily the main arteries.

Mr. Greg Carreau: That's correct.

Ms. Véronique Morisset: The main service lines are a much bigger diameter so the water is less in contact with the pipe itself.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Okay. It's mostly the laterals to the houses.

Ms. Véronique Morisset: Yes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I think the suggestion that we develop some kind of a loan program should be the priority. Let's get these laterals repaired if that is what's bringing most of the lead into the homes. That's what I would want to get done.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lauzon. Your time is up.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think it was the officials from Health Canada who earlier mentioned Canadian plumbing. I would like a clarification on that.

The provinces, through their own building codes, can use the federal standards.

Are the national plumbing standards the minimum standard?

Let me explain. If the provinces decide not to include this standard in their building code, does that mean theirs is higher?

If not, could they just not apply that standard?

Ms. Véronique Morisset: I do not know whether there is an obligation in that sense. It is not Health Canada's responsibility.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

Let me turn again to the officials from the Office of Infrastructure.

Earlier, we discussed issues such as the number and the size of projects and the amounts awarded.

In recent years, have any public water infrastructure projects not been funded and had to wait for phase 2 because there was no money left in the envelope?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: Not to our knowledge.

The project priorities are set by the provinces. So we do not always see all the projects that are approved by the municipalities, but the entire list of projects submitted by the provinces, specifically in relation to the new clean water and wastewater program, has been approved in recent months. As a result, over 800 projects have been approved over the past year. To our knowledge, as long as the allocation by province is met, projects submitted by the provinces are approved.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Could you tell me whether the needs are greater than the funding you have right now?

Ms. Laura Di Paolo: For infrastructure in general, the need is greater than the funding available. For example, although \$180 billion has been proposed for the next few years, we already see an overall gap of more than \$500 billion in infrastructure. I'm not just talking about water projects, but a portion of that amount would be spent on water.

Mr. Robert Aubin: That brings me to my next question.

As I understand it, project funding ranges from a few tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars to a few million dollars. So these are all projects that would not qualify for the infrastructure bank, because projects have to be worth \$100 million or more.

Yet, according to what has been announced for the next 10 years, the \$35 billion will go directly to the infrastructure bank and those funds will not be able to be used for projects like that.

Is that a significant shortfall for the projects submitted to you by all the provinces and territories?

• (1200)

[*English*]

The Chair: Give us a short answer, if possible, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: In my opinion, we must keep in mind that federal investments are still a marginal contribution. Provincial and municipal contributions must also be considered. Clearly, there are various competing needs. The fact remains that, in terms of the new investments, phase 2 that is, almost \$22 billion is reserved for green infrastructure. This includes \$9 billion to be earmarked for the provinces, which could be used to fund water projects.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Desruisseaux: So a considerable envelope has been set aside.

[*English*]

The Chair: To all our witnesses, thank you very much.

I think you see the interest around this table on this important issue.

Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey: I would like to make two comments.

One, and you hit it right on the head, this is already being funded by municipal, provincial, and federal programs, the building Canada fund, and the gas tax fund. It's up to the municipalities to prioritize this issue and enter into these programs. We have to recognize that. This has already been funded, but it's up to the municipalities to fund the particular programs that the residents may want to acquire.

Two, Madam Chair, we are entering into a process for smarter cities. May I suggest that we continue this dialogue with Mr. Bratina through the smart cities growth planning initiative so we can encourage municipalities and the province to make this a priority?

The Chair: It's a good point. We tried to get FCM this week, but they were not available on either date. They are, however, giving us a written submission.

Thank you very much for those comments, Mr. Badawey.

To all of the witnesses, again thank you. I have a feeling we may be talking to you further.

We will suspend the meeting briefly and will continue in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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