

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

State lawmakers seek shift in power

Measures aimed at curbing governors in future crises

By David A. Lieb
Associated Press

As governors loosen long-lasting coronavirus restrictions, state lawmakers across the U.S. are taking actions to significantly limit the power they could wield in future emergencies.

The legislative measures are aimed not simply at undoing mask mandates and capacity limits that have been common during the pandemic. Many proposals seek to fundamentally shift power away from governors and toward lawmakers the next time there is a virus outbreak, terrorist attack or natural disaster.

“The COVID pandemic has been an impetus for a reexamination of balancing of legislative power with executive powers,” said Pam Greenberg, a policy researcher at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Lawmakers in 45 states have proposed more than 300 measures this year related to legislative oversight of executive actions during the pandemic or other emergencies, according to the NCSL.

About half those states are considering significant changes, such as tighter limits on how long

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Getting a step closer to owning a home

An Illinois program is paying off student loans to encourage homeownership, and that’s drawing buyers to the state. **Real Estate**

Momentum building to return to offices

COVID-19 vaccinations are accelerating, forcing CEOs to plot a return to the workplace sooner than expected. **Business**

How the pandemic has affected children

Childhood tantrums, nightmares and headaches are up in Chicago during the pandemic, according to a new survey. **Life+Travel**

Vaccine shortages hit poor countries

Deliveries through a global program intended to help poorer countries are blocked until as late as June. **Nation & World, Page 25**



Kyle McCradic coils an old lead service line in Galesburg, which is planning to replace all of its lead service lines this year. **JOSE M. OSORIO/TRIBUNE**

Chicago ‘ground zero’ for water line problem

City lags far behind in elimination of brain-damaging lead pipes

By Michael Hawthorne
Chicago Tribune

As President Joe Biden pushes a \$45 billion plan to replace every lead water line across the nation, dozens of cities already have a head start in eliminating the lingering threats to public health.

One glaring omission: Chicago.

Despite having more lead pipes known as service lines than any other U.S. city, Chicago denied for years it had a wide-

spread problem. The first sign of change came this month, when Mayor Lori Lightfoot launched a small pilot program to target the brain-damaging hazards in low-income neighborhoods.

City Hall is expecting to pay for the replacement of just 650 of Chicago’s 400,000 lead service lines this year, according to the Department of Water Management.

For the vast majority of homeowners, Lightfoot echoes what

they heard from her two immediate predecessors, Rahm Emanuel and Richard M. Daley. It is up to individual property owners, not the city, to decide if it is worth replacing the toxic pipes at their own expense.

So far the most the water department is willing to do is waive permit fees for privately financed pipe replacements, even though Chicagoans once didn’t have a choice when it came to how drinking water is delivered

to their homes. The city’s plumbing code required the use of lead pipes to connect street mains to single-family houses and two-flats until Congress banned the practice in 1986.

“Chicago is ground zero for this problem,” said Tom Neltner, chemicals policy director at the nonprofit Environmental Defense Fund and former assistant commissioner of the Indiana

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Lightfoot calls for police foot-chase policy



People protest the killing of Adam Toledo at the corner of North Wabash Avenue and East Chestnut Street in Chicago’s Gold Coast neighborhood on Friday. **CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

“We want answers. We want to know why he was being chased. I’m tired of seeing this not only in my city, in the North Side of Chicago. I’m tired of seeing that everywhere, in the South Side.”

— Roxana Figueroa, a cousin of Anthony Alvarez, on behalf of his family at a recent protest

Move comes in wake of 2 fatal shootings, including a 13-year-old

By Paige Fry, Annie Sweeney and Jeremy Gerner
Chicago Tribune

In less than 48 hours in two separate city neighborhoods last month, police fatally shot someone following a foot chase, including a Little Village 13-year-old whose death has roiled City Hall and renewed calls for change in the practices of the Chicago Police Department.

Adam Toledo’s age and the fact he was killed by a police officer touched off familiar vigils and marches — and led to a quick promise from Mayor Lori Lightfoot that the city would, at last, adopt a policy to limit foot pursuits.

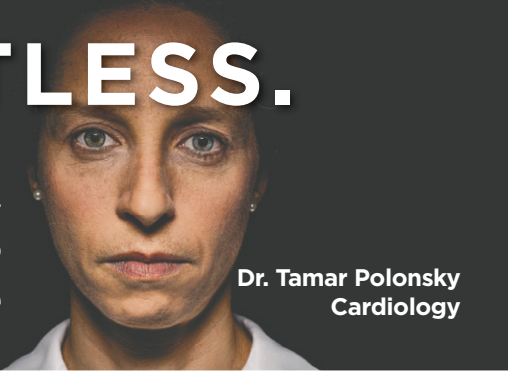
The shooting of 22-year-old Anthony Alvarez after another foot chase received less attention, but his family is also seeking to understand what led to his fatal encounter with police. Both cases remain under inves-

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Tickets are still available for virtual 2021 Takeout Awards: On April 26, from 6 p.m. to 7:15 p.m., please join us for a virtual celebration of the hospitality workers, chefs and owners who made a difference in our city in 2020. The event will take place via Zoom. Ticket holders will receive a link via email 24 hours before the start of the event. Register for tickets at chicagotribune.com/takeoutvent. The event is free, but please consider making a suggested donation of at least \$25. All donations will benefit Dish-Roulette Kitchen, a nonprofit organization providing grants, training and business assistance to local, minority-owned restaurants and food vendors. Featured speakers will include Diana Davila (chef and owner of Mi Tocaya Antojeria), Jeremy Joyce (founder of Black People Eats) and Beverly Kim (co-chef and co-owner of Parachute and Wherewithall).

“Life Skills: How To Do Almost Anything” How do you give a good wedding toast? How do you fix a clogged drain? How do you bowl without hurting anyone? Questions like these—some highly practical, others wildly funny—make up this engaging do-it-yourself guide. Collected from the Chicago Tribune how-to columns called “Life Skills,” this book is filled with often humorous instructions on performing a variety of tasks.

“Dinner at Home.” Cooking at home doesn’t have to be difficult, but it should always be delicious. Since 2007, Jean-Marie Brownson, culinary director for Rick Bayless’ Frontera Foods, has been helping readers put inventive, yet simple, dishes on the table through her Dinner at Home column for the Tribune. Her book includes everything you need to create spectacular food any day of the week, including sample menus and recipes for everything from prosciutto parmesan puffs to roasted chicken with tomato-olive relish. Dinner at home has never been better.

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Margaret Holt, standards editor

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Nick Downs uncoils copper pipe for lead service line replacement in Denver in December 2019. Denver Water replaced 5,200 lead service lines last year and delivered more than 100,000 filters to residents. **ANDY CROSS/THE DENVER POST PHOTOS**

Lead

from Page 1

Department of Environmental Management. “But for too long city officials resisted doing anything about it, and given what’s happening all around the country they should be a lot more aggressive.”

A recent Chicago Tribune analysis found that lead in tap water is a danger throughout Illinois.

More than 8 of every 10 Illinoisans live in a community where the toxic metal was detected in at least one home during the past six years, the newspaper found. Dozens of homes had hundreds and even thousands of parts per billion of lead in tap water — just as extreme as what researchers found during the same period in Flint, Michigan, where mismanagement of the public water system drew a world spotlight to a scourge that remained largely hidden for decades. “It’s just plain wrong that in the United States of America today, millions of children still receive their water through lead service pipes,” Biden said last month on Twitter after proposing to replace them through his \$2 trillion American Jobs Plan. “It’s long past time we fix that.”

Cities including Cincinnati, Denver, Detroit and Newark, New Jersey, provide a roadmap for Chicago and other municipalities, whether or not lawmakers approve Biden’s plan.

Instead of adding chemicals to the water supply that form a protective coating inside lead pipes, as Chicago does, Denver followed the advice of physicians and scientists who concluded after years of study that there are only two effective methods to keep lead out of tap water: replacing toxic pipes and using filters certified to screen out lead.

Last year alone, Denver Water, the city’s drinking water utility, replaced 5,200 lead service lines and delivered more than 100,000 filters to residents, using a portion of the money it collects from customers to pay for the program. The pipe replacements cost \$10,000 on average, said Tom Roode, the utility’s chief of operations and maintenance.

Chicago’s water department, by contrast, has distributed about 63,500 sets of filters since late 2018 and provides testing kits on request. In their application for a low-interest loan financed by Congress and the General Assembly, city officials estimated it will cost \$27,000 to replace each of the 650 lead service lines they plan to dig out of the ground this year.

Another difference is Chicago’s water department says it doesn’t know where all of the city’s lead service lines are located. Utilities in Cincinnati and Denver mapped their service areas and posted the data online, enabling residents to look up their address and determine whether they might be at risk.

Denver’s mapping project also considered the disproportionate impact of childhood lead poisoning in low-income Black and Latino neighborhoods.



A cutout section of a lead water pipe removed by a Denver Water crew in December 2019.

Plugged into an algorithm, the demographic data helps direct the utility to where it should focus its service line replacements, said Jim Lochhead, the Denver Water chief executive.

“Our position going into this was we really didn’t care about cost, we wanted to protect public health,” Lochhead said in a recent interview. “It turned out that replacing lead service lines and distributing filters is less expensive than other options we considered.”

The Chicago Department of Water Management declined to make officials available for comment. In an email response to questions, the department defended its cost estimates, which are more than five times higher than the national average to replace service lines. “Our costs are full costs including restoration, labor, materials, design, inspection, tapping back to the water main, and permit fees.”

Denver and Detroit reduced costs by replacing lead service lines at the same time crews dig up streets to install new water mains. Detroit’s water utility has replaced more than 1,100 toxic pipes this way since 2018, at an average cost of \$5,000 per line, according to a presentation Wednesday to other industry officials.

Gary Brown, director of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, urges colleagues from other cities to repeatedly visit neighborhoods before replacement work begins, giving people a chance to understand why digging up their street will help protect them.

“If you lose the confidence in your water system, you never get it back. You become Flint,” Brown said in an interview.

There is no doubt that overhauling an aging network of municipal pipes and pumping stations is key to conserving the limited amount of water Chicago is allowed to siphon from Lake Michigan every day. The city has borrowed more than \$490 million during the past decade to replace hundreds of miles of water mains, some of which had been installed during the late 19th century. Emanuel doubled water rates to pay off the debt.

But on every block dug up since 2011, city crews attached new water mains to existing lead service lines.

The Department of Water Management accelerated

this hazardous practice despite a 2013 federal study of Chicago homes that found street work, including the installation of water mains, could trigger spikes of lead in tap water for days or months afterward.

Even the 2015 crisis in Flint didn’t move Chicago to start removing toxic pipes. Workers kept hooking up new water mains to existing lead service lines and continue to do so today under Lightfoot.

“By now there shouldn’t be anyone out there who isn’t aware of the dangers,” said Miguel del Toral, a retired U.S. Environmental Protection Agency scientist who led the Chicago study and discovered high levels of lead in water at homes in Flint and East Chicago, Indiana. “The main thing we lack, especially in Chicago, is political will to fix this once and for all.”

The EPA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stress that lead is unsafe to consume at any level. More than 400,000 deaths a year in the U.S. are linked to the toxic metal. Even tiny concentrations can permanently damage the developing brains of children and contribute to heart disease, high blood pressure, kidney failure and other health problems later in life.

In many cases the cities replacing lead service lines are doing so on their own.

A major reason why the toxic pipes remain in Chicago and other cities is most water utilities aren’t required to replace them under the federal Lead and Copper Rule, a 1991 regulation that underestimates the hazards and, in several ways, keeps them hidden from the public.

Researchers have found that lead levels in tap water can vary widely between homes and during different times of day, depending on water usage, the length of individual service lines and other factors that can limit the effectiveness of corrosion-inhibiting chemicals added to the water supply.

Yet the regulatory tests analyzed by the Tribune were collected using EPA protocols that require sampling of just the first liter of water drawn after faucets have been turned off overnight. More extensive sampling in Chicago, Flint and other cities showed the highest levels of lead often flowed out of taps after water had been running for several minutes.

Citing the Tribune analysis, Illinois Sens. Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth are urging the Biden EPA to aggressively confront the problem.

“These chronic issues in Illinois and across the United States call for the toughest possible standards backed by science,” the two Democrats wrote in a March 30 letter to Michael Regan, the new EPA administrator.

The EPA already suspended regulations adopted during the waning days of the Trump administration that effectively delayed lead service line replacements for up to three decades and, in some cases, allowed cities to keep toxic pipes in the ground indefinitely.

Regan said the administration is prioritizing the removal of lead service lines, no matter what its revamped regulations might require. Some of the language in Biden’s infrastructure plan comes from bipartisan legislation sponsored by Duckworth, who secured its passage through a key Senate committee last month.

“We can walk and chew gum at the same time,” Regan said during a recent online roundtable with water officials from across the nation. “Our work is not complete until everyone in the United States has access to safe water that meets EPA standards, no matter the color of their skin, how much money they have in their pockets or their ZIP code.”

Among the cities that have already finished replacing lead service lines is Lansing, Michigan.

The city’s independent water utility spread the project over 12 years, driving down the cost of each replacement from \$9,000 on average to no more than \$3,000, in part by relying on truck-mounted boring machines instead of digging up entire yards to remove toxic pipes.

“Well before Flint, we started hearing chatter about all of these issues with lead,” said Dick Peffley, general manager of the Lansing Board of Water and Light. “We decided to just replace all of our service lines because if corrosion control fails you’ve got a big problem on your hands. Plus it’s just the right thing to do.”

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