

The Oregonian

City of Portland didn't immediately act on high lead at Multnomah Arts Center

By Brad Schmidt

June 5, 2016

Portland officials detected high lead levels in the drinking water of a city park building in 2011, 2012 and 2013 but took few steps to make the water safe until last week, officials announced Sunday.

The disclosure follows an inquiry from The Oregonian/OregonLive on Friday, when a parks spokesman said the city [didn't systematically test lead levels](#) at park facilities. He didn't provide additional information, saying more would be forthcoming.

Sunday's disclosure revealed that testing of the [Multnomah Arts Center in Southwest Portland](#) found high lead levels in [11 water samples collected from a kitchen, a classroom and drinking fountains](#).

The facility offers art classes and preschool for children.

It's the latest acknowledgement that government officials have known about high lead levels in public buildings but haven't notified residents or been able to document necessary fixes. The city of Portland's disclosure follows a [growing public-relations crisis involving Portland Public Schools](#), where officials have failed to show they acted on high lead tests at several schools.

At the Multnomah Arts Center, five rounds of testing took place between February 2011 and June 2013 – with high lead levels found each time. Officials said Sunday that they took "some corrective actions" for sinks in 2013. But Mark Ross, a Portland Parks & Recreation spokesman, would not provide details.

Portland Parks & Recreation "leadership" didn't learn about those past high test results until "late" Friday, according to a city announcement. Yet parks officials also said they installed or replaced filters Tuesday – three days before that.

Ross couldn't explain why work began Tuesday but top leaders didn't learn about the past tests until Friday.

"There's a lot of stuff that we just became aware of," he said.

Portland Commissioner Amanda Fritz has overseen Portland Parks & Recreation since June 2013, and Mike Abbaté has been director since October 2011. Commissioner Nick Fish oversaw the bureau in 2011 and 2012, when the older testing occurred.

"I am sorry that Portland Parks & Recreation did not notify the Commissioner in Charge or the MAC community of these test results when they occurred, and that we did not ensure that protocols were in place to ensure immediate and complete remediation," Abbaté said in

a prepared statement. "Over the coming weeks, we will review what happened and institute new safety and reporting protocols."

The Environmental Protection Agency sets an "action level" of 15 parts per billion for lead in drinking water.

But at the city-owned facility in Southwest Portland, water from a drinking fountain collected June 19, 2013, tested as high as 62.5 parts per billion. Other high levels from 2011 to 2013 ranged from 17 to 58 parts per billion.

Until new testing is complete, Portland officials say they've shut off fountains and placed signs in front of faucets warning not to drink the water. Bottled water will be provided to visitors of the building, at 7688 S.W. Capitol Highway in Multnomah Village.

Portland officials say they'll also test at two other locations: the Portland Children's Museum and the Fulton Park Community Center, both in Southwest Portland. Although park officials say they believe the likelihood of exposure at each site is "very low," they'll flush water every morning until testing can be completed.

City officials on Sunday did not propose checking lead levels at other parks facilities, however, saying they'll determine if such systematic testing is needed.

"We will review available scientific and engineering information, and work with the Portland Water Bureau and partners at Multnomah County in public health to determine any other priority sites, as well as system-wide testing needs," Fritz said in a prepared statement.

Concerns over lead have plagued the nation in the fallout over exceptionally high levels found throughout Flint, Michigan. The Portland Water Bureau provides drinking water to city residents and some suburbs and, although the water doesn't contain lead, it's [relatively low pH levels make it susceptible to leaching lead](#) from plumbing.

Testing of high-risk homes in [Portland found the highest lead levels of any large water provider across America](#), The Oregonian/OregonLive reported in April. An estimated 43,000 homes in Portland and suburbs that receive water from Portland are considered at-risk, a number that doesn't include multifamily properties, commercial buildings or schools.

Fritz said in her statement Sunday that she's asked for an explanation for the "delay in taking action at Multnomah Arts Center." It's unclear who would provide such an explanation or if the city plans to hire an outside agency to review its actions.

Fritz also promised to be transparent about decision-making.

Fritz declined an interview request Sunday, saying in a text message that her comments were included in the public announcement.

Portland city commissioners' code of silence on police accountability: Editorial Agenda 2016

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

June 4, 2016

Back in October 2014, Portland city commissioners [professed their commitment](#) to hold Portland Police accountable for their actions. The commissioners at the time were [discussing police reforms mandated](#) by a settlement with the federal justice department over excessive force allegations. But the message they sent was not limited to the parameters of the settlement.

Portlanders, Commissioner Amanda Fritz noted, should look to the council as a whole, not just Mayor Charlie Hales, to ensure the police bureau acted in conformance with the [values of the community](#). "For the first time," [she said](#), "the entire council is responsible for police accountability."

It's telling, then, how dead silent she and the other commissioners have been for the last two weeks as the story of Portland Police Chief [Larry O'Dea's accidental shooting of a friend](#) during a hunting trip – and Hales' failure to disclose it – has unfolded. Being "responsible" for police accountability, it seems, means waiting for someone else to say or do something, no matter the cost to the public's trust.

The need for someone in leadership to rally the public's confidence has been obvious from the moment reporters revealed that O'Dea was under investigation for a shooting. There's the strange details of the shooting itself: O'Dea, camping in Harney County with six others, [was drinking alcohol and firing](#) at ground squirrels when he accidentally shot his friend on April 21, The Oregonian/OregonLive's Maxine Bernstein reported. The injury was not life-threatening.

But things got stranger after investigators arrived on the scene. [O'Dea misled the deputy](#), suggesting that the victim had somehow shot himself, Harney County Sheriff Dave Ward told Bernstein. O'Dea never corrected that account, Ward said, even though O'Dea admitted to Hales four days later that he had shot his friend. And the chief never identified himself as a law enforcement officer, a standard practice in off-duty situations where police respond.

Then there's Hales' handling of the case. Hales [chose to keep quiet](#) about the shooting for nearly a month. Not only did he fail to alert the public to the fact that the police chief was under criminal investigation, but he also failed to refer the matter to the [Independent Police Review](#), which conducts personnel investigations for high-level officers. He also didn't place the chief on administrative leave until after Ward's comments about O'Dea's misleading account. Even then, Hales [downplayed the move](#) as a way to help clear some of the "turmoil and confusion" at the police bureau. Certainly, a criminal investigation of a sitting police chief can cause that.

Hales' statements show that he does not recognize how such special treatment for the police chief harms the integrity of the police bureau as a whole. Putting the chief on leave is the

bare minimum of what we should expect from a leader, at least one who understands his loyalty should be to the public, not his cronies. Hales, unfortunately, is not that leader.

So far, the other city commissioners fall into that category as well. None has openly questioned Hales' decision to keep the matter quiet or publicly urged Hales to place O'Dea on administrative leave. None has come out to say that the allegations of O'Dea's misleading statements or that [his assistant chiefs also knew of the shooting](#) without alerting investigators are troubling. By staying silent, no one is championing the public or acknowledging its justified anger of yet another breach of trust by the police and the leaders who oversee them.

Commissioner Nick Fish told The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board that he shares the public's concerns about the failure to notify the Independent Police Review, which started its own investigation after reading about the shooting in news reports. He said, however, that he is waiting for the results of the investigation before commenting further.

Chris Warner, chief of staff for Commissioner Steve Novick, said Novick has been out of town since May 20 and that the two have not spoken about the O'Dea case. Novick presumably, however, has access to communications considering he has posted on social media several times since then. Commissioner Amanda Fritz's chief of staff, Tim Crail, said the commissioner does not publicly comment on personnel issues. Commissioner Dan Saltzman has similarly not come out publicly on the case.

City commissioners don't need to wait for the results of an investigation to assure the community that they will hold the police chief accountable if he engaged in misconduct. They aren't violating anyone's privacy by criticizing Hales' bad decision to keep such a matter of public importance secret. They can and should offer their support for the Independent Police Review division and emphasize the need for all officials, Hales included, to promptly report cases that require their investigation.

Fritz was right when she said in October 2014 that the community should be able to expect the city council to hold the police bureau accountable. Unfortunately, she and her fellow commissioners have too easily ducked an opportunity to do so.

Portland doesn't check lead levels in drinking water at Parks

By Brad Schmidt

June 4, 2016

Portland Parks & Recreation doesn't conduct regular lead testing of drinking water at city parks or community centers, a spokesman said Friday.

The Oregonian/OregonLive asked the Parks Bureau about lead as [school districts across the metro area pledged their own testing](#) amid fallout [over Portland Public Schools' crisis](#).

Mark Ross, a parks spokesman, said in an email that officials are now considering system-wide testing.

"In light of recent news, we are determining whether or not we should do that, as a best practice protocol," he wrote.

Ross said some tests have been conducted over the years but he didn't provide specifics. Officials are gathering information on where and when it occurred, what the testing found, and any remediation steps if high levels were detected.

"We need to make sure we can determine all the tests conducted across our system," he wrote, adding that parks officials plan to consult with the Portland Water Bureau.

Ross said he'd provide more information next week.

The Portland Water Bureau provides drinking water across the city and to several suburbs. While the water doesn't contain lead, it is susceptible to leaching lead from building plumbing.

That's because Portland's water has relatively low pH levels, making it more corrosive. Federal officials would like Portland to increase pH levels but Portland struck a deal with state regulators in the 1990s to provide only minimal water treatment, focusing instead on lead paint remediation.

Portland's recommended pH level is 9 but it has typically tracked at [7.4 to 8.1](#), with a new city report pegging [it at 7.5 to 8.5](#).

Among high-risk homes, [Portland's lead levels are higher than any other large water provider nationally](#).

A Hales-Wheeler-Hand off plan: Editorial Peek

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

June 3, 2016

Mayor Charlie Hales deserves credit for undertaking the uncomfortable but necessary task of [planning the transition](#) from his administration to Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler. While Hales still has seven months in office and a number of goals he wants to achieve, it's smart to recognize that Wheeler, elected by more than 50 percent of voters in the May primary, should not only be briefed but have input in the city's long-term direction.

[Hales' plan](#) calls for regular meetings between himself and his staff with Wheeler and Wheeler's staff. In addition, he is inviting Wheeler to participate in such critical matters as the search for a new executive director for the Portland Development Commission and contract negotiations with Portland Police. It would be preferable for Hales to leave both of those tasks to his successor. However, it is promising that he recognizes that any decisions made now will last far beyond his own tenure and that Wheeler should have a say.

Hales said on [OPB's Think Out Loud](#) that his predecessor, former Mayor Sam Adams, did little to help with the transition. Good for Hales for putting the city's needs first in this case and making a smooth transition a priority.

The Portland Mercury

The Dirty Seven: Forest Service Moss Data Identifies Portland's Top Spots for Multiple Heavy-Metal Exposure

By Daniel Forbes

June 4, 2016

The United States Forest Service is slated to release data next week that provide a fuller picture of the heavy-metal pollution captured by moss it collected in December 2013. It's the same moss data that caused a furor in February, after it helped state officials unearth alarming air toxic levels near Bullseye Glass, findings [first reported](#) by the *Mercury*.

The *Mercury* has learned that among results to be released in an approximately 50-page technical report, the Forest Service has identified the top seven sites in Portland suffering exposure to the heavy-metals lead, chromium, arsenic, nickel, cadmium and cobalt as identified by the moss collected from December 2 to December 23, 2013. Some of the sites, such as moss collected near both Bullseye and Precision Castparts Corp., are well known. Others are not.

One previously undisclosed site is in the Pearl District, apparently within the critical half-mile for air-toxics exposure of thousands of upscale condos and ritzy businesses. Another new site is in the vicinity of the Portland State University main campus.

The top seven sites in the data are not ranked by exposure. It is known that among the 346 moss collection sites, the seven appearing in the map generated by the *Mercury* above were those with the highest levels of more than one heavy metal.

The Pearl District site suffered exposure to lead, chromium and cobalt. The PSU-vicinity collection site indicated exposure to elevated levels of the same three metals.

It's unknown what the exact exposure levels were beyond the fact that the sites were the seven highest in the city for more than one heavy metal. For context, though, consider that the site associated with Bullseye Glass—which was pinpointed by moss data—[turned up](#) exposure to cadmium that was as much as 325-times higher than Oregon's annual safe-air goal. The top arsenic reading was 505-times higher than the state's annual benchmark.

It should be noted that the moss levels for chromium are for total chromium. There's no practical way for scientists to determine which type of chrome, whether carcinogenic hexavalent chromium or relatively benign trivalent chromium, was captured by the moss.

At this point, it's a matter of speculation as to the facilities causing exposure at sites 2, 5, and 6—with number 6, in Southeast Portland, coming up high for nickel and cobalt.

For the other four sites, at least one likely source can be identified: Site number 1 (nickel, chromium, arsenic and cobalt) is near PCC; number 3 (arsenic, chromium and cobalt) is within shouting distance of Glass Alchemy on NE Columbia Blvd.; number 4 (cadmium, chromium and cobalt) is near North Portland's Uroboros Glass; and number 7 (cadmium and arsenic) is near Bullseye. Matters will become clearer when the Forest Service releases its raw data probably next week.

The Portland Business Journal

Lead update: Parks department shuts off fountains at Multnomah Art Center

By Andy Giegerich

June 6, 2016

Portland's parks and recreation department has shut off drinking fountains at a Southwest facility after learning of high lead levels in the water since, at least, 2013.

The department said it learned late in the day PP&R leadership learned late Friday of the results and is examining why there were delays in informing the city and the public of the high lead levels at the Multnomah Art Center.

The city said elevated lead levels were detected in 2011, 2012 and 2013 for some of the facility's sinks. Some corrective issues were taken in 2013.

The department began examining test results in light of Portland Public Schools issues, [revealed in the past two weeks](#).

[Mike Abbate](#), the parks department director, apologized for the delays in releasing test results.

"I am sorry that Portland Parks & Recreation did not notify the Commissioner in Charge ([Amanda Fritz](#)) or the MAC community of these test results when they occurred, and that we did not ensure that protocols were in place to ensure immediate and complete remediation," he said in a release.

"We are retesting the site so that our staff and visitors can be assured that lead levels for drinking water are within EPA guidelines."

Abbate added that the department will prioritize testing at Fulton Community Center and the Portland Children's Museum, "even though we have no previous elevated lead level results at those sites. We will publish testing results as soon as possible."

Fritz also requested information on remediation work at all parks facilities.

GoLocalPDX

Kaufman Index Ranks Portland Poorly for Entrepreneurship

By GoLocalPdx Business Team

June 6, 2016

The Kauffman Index of Growth Entrepreneurship ranks Portland metro area as 28th of the 40 largest metro areas. The reports "present trends in Growth Entrepreneurship in each state and the 40 largest metro areas relying on three composite indicators to look at business revenue and job growth: Rate of Startup Growth, Share of Scaleups and High-Growth Company Density."

The report is just the latest national business ranking that paints a dismal picture of the Providence metro area.

In contrast, San Jose, CA ranks as one of the strongest growth areas in America. “Most of the metros considered "usual suspects" for growth, including Austin, Boston, San Diego, San Francisco and San Jose, performed very well. But top performers also included Washington, D.C.; Nashville, Tennessee; Columbus, Ohio; and other metros not typically noted for entrepreneurship,” writes the report.