



Water-Smart Program for Lead in Drinking Water at Schools and Early Education and Childcare Facilities Malden Seminar June 17, 2025, Report



Summary of the Event

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection- Drinking Water Program's (MassDEP/DWP) – Water Smart* Program hosted a seminar in conjunction with Clean Water Action, the MassDEP Environmental Justice Office and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) to raise awareness about lead exposure. It was held on June 17th from 6-8 PM at the Malden High School and a total of 28 participants attended, including childcare providers, education professionals, Malden officials, nonprofit organizations, DPH staff, and MassDEP staff (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Left to right first row Alex Gamble (MassDEP), Alex Smith-Lin (MassDEP), Gufran Bulbul (MassDEP), Adam Horwitz (UMass Amherst), Nishaila Porter (MassDEP), Gildaly Valdez (Greater Lawrence Community Action Council), 2 Undisclosed Childcare Providers, Ana Rodriguez (Cozy Cave childcare owner), Xochitl Perez (MassDEP), Claudia Vega (Childcare Facility Owner), Marian Berkowitz (UMass Amherst). Second row Right to left: Parker Honey (DPH), Brandy Litt (DPH), Reina Matsumoto (Asian Community Development Corp), Marissa Zampino (Mystic River Watershed Association), Jillian Harvey (NAACP Mystic Valley Area Branch), Laura Spark (Clean Water Fund), Michael Neville (Malden DPW), Laura Vasluk (Malden Director of Public Health), Bryan Sanderson (Malden DPW), Jeffrey Leonard (MassDEP), John Saia (Public Health Advocate).

The seminar was organized in collaboration with Kiera Alventosa and Laura Spark of the Clean Water Fund- the 501(c)3 branch of Clean Water Action. Their organization provided translation equipment (e.g., headphones and microphones) and a trained English to Spanish interpreter.



Figure 2. Xochitl Perez (MassDEP) opening the Water-Smart Program Seminar



Figure 3. Michael Neville and Bryan Sanderson from Malden DPW presenting



Figure 4. Participants engaging in the Seminar as Jessica Sibirski (DEP) presents



Figure 5. Adam Horwitz (DEP) and Caroline Adamson (DEP) operating the program registration/informational table



Figure 6. Brandy Litt and Parker Honey from DPH.

The program covered a range of topics, including lead exposure in drinking water, MassDEP free lead testing Water-Smart Program, MDPH Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, and Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education Program, MassDEP lead Service Line Inventory, and the City of Malden's Lead Service Replacement Program (Figure 2 , 3, 4 and 5). Participants - received materials translated into Spanish, Portuguese, simplified Chinese, and Haitian Creole as well as a free water filter Fig 6 and 10).

*Formerly the Expanded Assistance Program for Lead in School Drinking Water. Water-Smart is funded through the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act and provided by MassDEP.

Our Collaborators

The City of Malden was identified as a High-Risk Community in the 2023 Annual Childhood Lead Poisoning Surveillance Report but is not currently categorized as a disadvantaged community with an Economically disadvantaged population. In response, a diverse group of collaborators attended the seminar and represented themselves in an effort to assist the community and protect children’s health. This coalition includes ambassadors from several local organizations: **Cambridge Health Alliance, Massachusetts Senior Action Council, Chinese Culture Connection, Mystic River Watershed Association, Malden River Works, Friends of the Malden River, Asian Community Development Corporation, Friends of Roosevelt Park, and Greater Lawrence Community Action Council.** Two key program advocates and childcare system owners/providers, Claudia Vega from **Child Development and Education** and Ana Rodriguez from **Cozy Cave**, (Figure 7 and 8) were also in attendance. While MassDEP coordinated with BWR’s EJ Coordinator, Nishaila Porter, to provide translated materials, translation equipment (supplied by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs) and a trained interpreter for Portuguese-speaking attendees, one of our other collaborators, **Clean Water Fund**, ensured accessibility for Spanish-speaking attendees by providing translation equipment (headphones and microphones), as well as a trained interpreter. Another collaborator, the **NAACP Mystic Valley Branch**, provided light refreshments.



Figure 7. Claudia Vega (Child Development and Education) and Ana Rodriguez (Cozy Cave childcare owner) pose with seminar attendees.



Figure 8. Claudia Vega, childcare owner, sharing her experience participating in the Water-Smart Program.

Water-Smart Program and Future Work

Since 1988, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) Drinking Water Program (DWP) has taken a proactive stance in addressing and eliminating lead in school drinking water. The Water-Smart Program is a voluntary program for public and private schools and licensed early education and care facilities that offers technical assistance with lead in drinking water outreach and education, water testing, and support for remediation actions. Upon completion of the program, facilities are provided with a certificate of completion to display.



Figure 9. Jessica Sibirski from DEP presenting the Water-Smart sampling process



Figure 10. Brochure available in both English and Spanish for the free informational session: "Lead in Drinking Water."

Following this seminar, the Water-Smart Program will continue collaborating with Malden partners to encourage all childcare facilities in the city to participate in lead testing. The goal is to ensure that any facilities with lead concentrations above the laboratory analytical testing limit of 1 part per billion (ppb or µg/L) take the necessary remediation actions based on program recommendations. So far, 5 of the Family-Based Child Care centers in Malden have participated in the program and completed testing. The program plans to invite all facilities in Malden through the Water-Smart Pilot Program. The city of Malden has already agreed to join the pilot program as it assists municipal water suppliers meet several upcoming requirements of the Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI), most notably including offering free lead testing to facilities built or had plumbing replaced before 1/1/2014 or are served by lead/galvanized (GRR) or Unknown Service Line Materials. Malden DPW would conduct outreach to facilities using contact info and templates provided by MassDEP, as well as collect samples at school facilities to be shipped/delivered to a MassDEP certified lab. The city would also be joining other municipalities prioritizing testing for lead in childcare facilities.

More information:

- Water-Smart Story Map: <https://mass-eoeaa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=c8f635cf3a4b443998245f6045b4c013>
- Water-Smart Webpage: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/technical-assistance-for-lead-in-school-and-child-care-center-drinking-water>
- Lead and Copper in School Drinking Water Results: <https://eeaaonline.eea.state.ma.us/portal#!/search/leadandcopper>
- MassDEP Drinking Water Program: program.director-dwp@mass.gov Subject: Lead in Schools Drinking Water or 617-292-2770 or UMass-DEP LCCA-Program: lccadep@umass.edu

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