Legislative Assembly of Ontario

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Bill 157

An Act to enact the Safer Drinking Water for a Healthier Future Act, 2026

Co-sponsors:
Ms C. Pasma
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Private Members' Bill

1st Reading November 24, 2026

2nd Reading

3rd Reading

Royal Assent

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Bill enacts the *Safer Drinking Water for a Healthier Future Act, 2026*, which requires the Government of Ontario to take all necessary measures to ensure that laws of Ontario respecting testing for levels of lead in drinking water in Ontario are, at a minimum, consistent with Canadian guidelines.

Section 4 requires broader public sector organizations that own or occupy a building in which water fountains or taps are used for drinking water or the preparation of food to sample water in those fountains and taps, and test the sampled water for lead. The Act sets out rules for the sampling and for the timing of the sampling. The Act also permits the Minister to create a list of priority buildings and sets out different timing of sampling rules in respect of such buildings. Subsection 4 (7) requires the broader public sector organizations to provide the results to the Minister and to the joint health and safety committee, and subsection 4 (8) requires the Minister to publish those results.

Section 5 requires broader public sector organizations to establish drinking water management plans and sets out what those plans will include and when they must be established. The Act requires the Minister to publish the plans.

Subsections 6 (1) to (3) allow the Minister to issue compliance orders, in respect of contraventions of sections 4 and 5, and sets out the rules and requirements with respect to such orders. Subsection 6 (4) provides that, if a compliance order requires it, a person shall immediately cease or restrict the provision of drinking water in accordance with the order. Subsections 6 (5) and (6) allow the Minister to issue orders imposing administrative penalties and provide that the amount of the penalty shall be specified or determined in accordance with the regulations.

The Act also sets out the rules with respect to reviewing orders and provides the Minister with the authority to make regulations relating to certain matters.

Bill 157 **2026**

An Act to enact the Safer Drinking Water for a Healthier Future Act, 2026

Preamble

Safe drinking water is a basic human necessity and essential for protecting the health of all Ontarians. Yet, across Ontario, there continue to be reports of elevated lead levels in the drinking water of publicly-funded schools, child care centres and other public institutions. This poses health risks to the general population and, especially, to children and individuals who work in those locations.

In 2019, the federal Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality established a maximum acceptable concentration of 5 parts per billion (ppb) for lead in drinking water. However, Ontario's provincial guideline remains at 10 ppb, which is double the federal recommended limit.

In the 2023-2024 school year, over 14 per cent of public schools in Ontario reported lead test results that exceeded federal safety guidelines. In child care centres, lead tests conducted in 2019-2020 and 2022-2023 showed almost four per cent of centres had lead levels exceeding the federal guideline.

Lead exposure, even at low level, can have harmful effects on human health. The consequences are especially severe for vulnerable populations, including children, pregnant persons and seniors. For people who are pregnant, immunocompromised or living with chronic health conditions, lead exposure can negatively impact the fetal development, further weaken immune defences and worsen illnesses such as kidney and cardiovascular disease, making such persons especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of lead.

Requiring stricter water sampling and remediation measures in public buildings and ensuring greater transparency from the public sector are meaningful steps towards reducing lead exposure and ensuring that water standards in the Province of Ontario more closely align with modern health standards.

Therefore, His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario, enacts as follows:

Definitions

1 In this Act,

"broader public sector organization" means a broader public sector organization within the meaning of the *Broader Public Sector Accountability Act, 2010*; ("organisme du secteur parapublic")

"Minister" means the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks or such other member of the executive council to whom the responsibility for the administration of this Act is assigned under the *Executive Council Act*. ("ministre")

Federal Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality

2 The Government of Ontario shall take all measures necessary to ensure that any laws of Ontario respecting the testing of levels of lead in drinking water are, at a minimum, consistent with the Government of Canada's Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality.

Application

3 Sections 4 to 8 apply to broader public sector organizations that own or occupy a building in which water fountains or taps are used for drinking water or the preparation of food.

Sampling and testing for lead

4 (1) Despite any other Act or regulation, each broader public sector organization shall ensure that,

(a) two samples of water are taken from each water fountain and tap used for drinking water or the preparation of food, in the parts of the building that the organization owns or occupies, in accordance with subsections (2) and (3); and

(b) those samples are tested for lead in accordance with the regulations.

Same, first sample

(2) The first sample required under subsection (1) shall be taken in accordance with the following rules:

1. If it is practicable to take the sample immediately after a period of six hours or more when the plumbing is not used, the sample must be taken immediately after that period.
2. If paragraph 1 does not apply, the sample must be taken immediately after the longest period when the plumbing is not used for which it is practicable to take the sample.
3. The sample must be taken immediately after the period referred to in paragraph 1 or 2 and before the plumbing is flushed.

Same, second sample

(3) The second sample required under subsection (1) shall be taken in accordance with the following rules:

1. Subject to paragraph 2, the second sample must be taken immediately after the first sample.
2. Before taking the second sample, the tap or fountain must be turned on for at least five minutes and then turned off and left unused for a period of at least 30 minutes but not more than 35 minutes.
3. If practicable, the plumbing must not be used during the period of at least 30 minutes but not more than 35 minutes that is referred to in paragraph 2.
4. The second sample must be taken immediately after the period of at least 30 minutes but not more than 35 minutes that is referred to in paragraph 2.

Timing

(4) An organization required to undertake sampling under subsection (1) shall ensure that such sampling happens at least once in each calendar year.

Priority buildings

(5) The Minister shall create a list of buildings that are identified, in accordance with the method set out in the regulations, as priority buildings due to,

(a) the age of the plumbing in the building;

(b) previous test results in respect of the building;

(c) the location of the building in communities at higher risk of lead exposure, including low-income, rural and Indigenous communities; and

(d) any other factors prescribed by the regulations.

Same, timing of sampling

(6) An organization required to undertake sampling in respect of a building identified as a priority building under subsection (5) shall ensure that such sampling happens at least once in each calendar year and at such other times as may be prescribed by the regulations.

Provision of results

(7) Within 30 days after receiving the results of any testing for lead required under this Act or any other Act, the broader public sector organization shall provide the results to the Minister and to the joint health and safety committee established under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

Publication of results

(8) After receiving the test results, the Minister shall ensure that the following information is published, in an accessible format, on a website of the Government of Ontario:

1. The test results.
2. A summary of the test results.
3. A searchable database of the test results organized by municipality.

Drinking water management plan

5 (1) Each broader public sector organization shall establish a drinking water management plan that will include the following details:

1. Identification of the water fountains and taps in the building owned or occupied by the broader public sector organization that are intended to be used for drinking water or the preparation of food.
2. A plan for labelling all water fountains and taps in the building, in a manner that can easily be understood, to indicate whether they are intended to be used for drinking water or the preparation of food.
3. If testing required under this Act indicates that the levels of lead in water from a water fountain or tap intended for drinking water or the preparation of food exceeds the maximum acceptable concentration as set out in the Government

of Canada's Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality, a plan for implementing safety measures, including the following measures:

i. Measures, including the use of labels indicating that the levels of lead in the water exceeds the maximum acceptable concentration, to prevent such water fountains or taps from being used for drinking water or the preparation of food until remediation measures are in place.

ii. Measures to remediate, including through the use of appropriate water filters, or replace such water fountains or taps within one year after testing and to ensure that levels of lead do not exceed unsafe levels before the water fountain or tap can be again used for drinking water or food preparation.

iii. If the water fountain or tap is in a school or child care centre, measures to ensure that parents and guardians are notified of the lead levels in water from such water fountains or taps.

iv. Measures to ensure the lead levels in water from such water fountains or taps are made available to the public upon request.

Timeline

(2) Each broader public sector organization shall provide the drinking water management plan to the Minister no later than one year after the later of the following dates:

1. The date subsection (1) comes into force.
2. The date the broader public sector organization takes ownership of or begins to occupy the building.

Publication

(3) The Minister shall publish each drinking water management plan on a website of the Government of Ontario.

Enforcement and compliance

Compliance orders

6 (1) The Minister may issue a compliance order to any person the Minister believes, on reasonable grounds, is contravening or has contravened section 4 or 5.

Same, what order may require

(2) A compliance order may require the person to whom it is issued to comply with the relevant provisions and with any directions set out in the order, including requiring the person to submit a plan for achieving compliance and requiring the person to post notice of the order.

Same, content of order

(3) A compliance order shall,

(a) specify the provision that the Minister believes is being or has been contravened;

(b) briefly describe the nature of the contravention;

(c) specify the dates by which the person to whom the order is issued is required to comply with the requirements set out in the order; and

(d) state that a review of the order may be requested within the timeline set out in subsection 7 (1).

Same, requirement to comply

(4) If required to do so in a compliance order, a person to whom the order is issued shall immediately cease or restrict the provision of drinking water in accordance with the directions in the order.

Administrative penalty

(5) If the Minister believes, on reasonable grounds, that a person is not complying with or has not complied with a requirement established under this Act, the Minister may, by order, impose an administrative penalty on the person.

Same, amount

(6) The amount of the administrative penalty shall be the amount specified or determined in accordance with the regulations.

Review of order

7 (1) A person may, within 15 days of receiving an order under section 6, make a written request to the Minister to review the decision in the order.

Minister to review

(2) If the Minister receives a request under subsection (1) within the required time, the Minister shall review the decision and confirm, amend or revoke the order.

Review by tribunal

(3) A person may, within 30 days of receiving a decision under subsection (2), appeal the decision to the Ontario Land Tribunal or such other tribunal or court as may be prescribed by the regulations.

Decision final

(4) A decision of the Ontario Land Tribunal, or other prescribed tribunal or court, as the case may be, is final.

Regulations

8 The Minister may make regulations,

(a) establishing rules for and governing the testing of samples for the purposes of clause 4 (1) (b);

(b) prescribing factors to be used in identifying a building as a priority building for the purposes of subsection 4 (5) and setting out the method for making such determination;

(c) prescribing times at which sampling must be undertaken for the purposes of subsection 4 (6);

(d) setting a specific amount of an administrative penalty and governing the determination of the amount of an administrative penalty, including criteria to be considered in making such a determination;

(e) prescribing tribunals or courts for the purposes of subsections 7 (3) and (4).

Commencement

9 This Act comes into force on the day it receives Royal Assent.

Short title

10 The short title of this Act is the *Safer Drinking Water for a Healthier Future Act, 2026*.