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California Department of Toxic Substances Control

The State's Poor Management of the Exide Cleanup Project Has Left Californians at Continued Risk of Lead Poisoning

Background

Responsible for enforcing hazardous waste laws and restoring resources contaminated with toxic substances, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (department) has been identifying and removing lead contamination for more than 10,000 properties surrounding a former lead battery recycling facility in Southern California since 2015. Approximately 100,000 people live in the area surrounding the facility operated by Exide Technologies and are at risk of lead exposure, which can cause significant health problems for vulnerable populations such as children.

Key Recommendations

To ensure that it minimizes the exposure of children and other at-risk individuals to lead contamination, the department should immediately begin cleaning all childcare centers, parks, and schools; deploy sufficient resources to clean the 3,200 most contaminated properties; and by April 2021, publish its plan for cleaning all remaining contaminated properties.

To ensure sufficient funding to complete the cleanup of these properties, the department should identify the full amount of funding needed, submit funding requests for budget discussion, and build in protections in future cleanup contracts to protect the State from paying cost overruns.

Key Findings

- Significantly behind schedule on its cleanup, the department has not cleaned all contaminated properties that pose a high risk to residents.
 - » From 2014 to 2017, it identified 50 properties—childcare centers, parks, and schools—where lead contamination posed particularly high risk to children, but it has yet to clean 31 because the department did not prioritize contracting for and expediting the cleanup of those properties.
 - » Based on its average cleanup pace of 20 properties per week, it is unlikely that the department will clean 3,200 of the most contaminated properties by its target date of June 2021.
 - » It does not have a timeline or planned approach to clean the remaining 4,600 contaminated properties.
- The cleanup project is likely to cost nearly \$650 million—more than twice as much as the State has already provided the department to date. Without additional funding, it will be unable to clean 269 of the most contaminated properties and none of the remaining 4,600 contaminated properties.
 - » It used outdated and inaccurate data to estimate cleanup cost and failed to account for inflation and paying prevailing wages in its original estimates.
 - » It paid about \$17 million more than it anticipated for costs overruns to clean nearly 770 properties due to poor protections in its contract with its largest cleanup vendor.

More than half of the lead-contaminated properties that children frequent remain contaminated years after the department learned about the dangerous levels of lead.

LEAD CONTAMINATION

