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Find HA Misled Feds On Extent of Agency Lead-Paint Checks

By CRYSTALLEWIS Aug 7, 2017 Updated 19 hrs ago



SCOTT STRINGER: 'Disturbed by failure to comply.'

The U.S. Attorney's Office's investigation of lead levels in public housing revealed that the Housing Authority falsely reported to the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development that it conducted lead-paint investigations in apartments that were never checked.

A spokesperson for the city Department of Investigation said that NYCHA "shifted from inspecting apartments every year to once every two years" from 2012 to 2014 in order to reduce the agency's backlog of open work orders.

Union: HA Evasive



SHOLA OLATOYE: Making it a priority.

Gregory Floyd, president of Teamsters Local 237, said that following the beginning of a Federal investigation of lead paint in NYCHA last year, he asked agency officials how significant a presence lead paint was in the city's public housing. He was told that the agency did not widely use lead paint prior to its 1960 ban because it was expensive.

"We didn't get an answer then and we still aren't getting one now," Mr. Floyd said.

Last year, NYCHA prioritized inspecting 4,702 units that potentially had lead-based paint with children younger than 6 living in them.

Between 2010 and 2015, 202 children who lived in 133 NYCHA apartments tested positive for lead poisoning. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene found that 63 of the apartments tested positive for lead paint, but when NYCHA conducted its own tests, it found lead in just 17 apartments, affecting 18 children.

Long-term exposure to lead can affect a child's developing brain and cause serious health problems.

NYCHA spokesperson Ilana Maier said that the agency has "identified certain gaps in compliance with the lead-based paint rule."

'Can, Must Do Better'

"NYCHA completed inspections in apartments with children under six in 2016 and will again in 2017, to ensure that these households are free of lead-based paint hazards. NYCHA is actively taking steps to bring the authority into compliance. We can and must do better," she said.

On July 28, Comptroller Scott Stringer wrote a letter to NYCHA Chairwoman Shola Olatoye demanding that the agency reveal "specific steps" to inform residents in lead-tainted buildings that weren't properly inspected about the problem, as well as questioning how much efforts to overhaul lead-paint inspections will cost. Mr. Stringer called the findings "deeply alarming," particularly because lead exposure is detrimental to young children.

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"That makes the admission of NYCHA's failure to comply with regulations all the more disturbing," he said.

Rep. Nydia Velazquez asked NYCHA to compile a list of apartments that likely contain lead paint and a count of units that have been cleaned up within 30 days.

Former U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara began the probe into NYCHA's compliance with Federal requirements on lead and lead-based paint last March, which included seeking information about public-housing residents with elevated blood-lead levels.

Wants Members Tested

Days after news of the Federal investigation broke, Mr. Floyd asked that his 8,000 NYCHA employees be tested for lead exposure.

The agency will make an "expensive" effort to fix the problem, Ms. Olatoye said in response to the probe's findings.

Mr. Floyd said he does not know what that effort will entail, but that the union "wants to work with the city on this issue because it is vital for our members who work and live in NYCHA."

