

Lead-Sheathed Telecom/Power Cables: Environmental Defense Fund Request to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



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The Environmental Defense Fund (“EDF”) and two other environmental organizations (collectively “EDF”) sent a July 17th letter to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) Administrator addressing what it described as lead-sheathed telecom and power cables.

The other two organizations executing the letter included:

- Below the Blue
- Clean Water Action

EDF requested that EPA investigate:

... the uncontrolled release of lead into the water or surface soil from more than 2,000 lead-sheathed telecom and power cables across the nation with more than 300 of these cables posing a threat to the source of drinking water for communities.

EDF asserts that due to the absence of EPA intervention:

- Risks posed by the cables will increase as they further deteriorate
- Lead will be released into the environment

The letter requests that EPA use Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act authority and Safe Drinking Water Act response authorities to address the issue.

Cited is EPA’s 2022 Strategy to Reduce Lead Exposures and Disparities. EDF states that lead-sheathed telecom and power cables were not addressed in the strategy as a source of lead exposure. They cite as information that has arisen regarding this issue the following publications:

- Marine Taxonomic Services (MTS), Lead Cable Investigation, June 30, 2023;
- Wall Street Journal, America Is Wrapped in Miles of Toxic Lead Cables, July 9, 2023;
- Wall Street Journal, How the Journal Investigated Hidden Lead Cables Circling the U.S., July 9, 2023;
- Wall Street Journal, Bayou Teche is an Epicenter of America’s Lead Cable Problem, July 10, 2023; and
- Wall Street Journal, AT&T and Verizon Knew About Toxic Lead Cables – and Did Little, July 12, 2023.

The EDF letter groups these cables into three categories for recommended prioritization by EPA which include:

- Aerial cable – prioritize for immediate removal

- Accessible to children – prioritize for immediate removal
- Underwater cables – assess their risk, prioritizing those in source water protection areas

A copy of the letter can be downloaded [here](#).