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## WATER CRISIS' FLOOD AMERICA

*Due to the regressing state of US water infrastructure, water crisis' similar to those of Flint, Michigan could eventually grow to larger scale.*

For many, the phrase “water crisis” or “clean water shortage” quickly bring to mind images of malnourished African children or mission trips to impoverished Central America. What few Americans know is that 41 out of 50 states are reporting unhealthy levels of lead in their drinking water, according to the EPA, and if the state of the water infrastructure in the United States doesn't improve the number of communities experiencing issues like Flint, Michigan is going to increase.

In a place like the U.S. where most citizens are so accustomed to free and available water it's hard to imagine what a serious crisis would look like. Because the state of America's water infrastructure gets more poor every year, crisis' present themselves in the form of lead poisoning. Extended exposure to small levels of lead, at the least, cause stunts to brain development in children and health issues in the heart, kidneys and nerves. Exposure to larger levels, however, have been known to cause comas, convulsions, and even death.

For almost two years, residents in Flint Michigan were exposed to unsafe levels of lead found in the pungent-smelling tap water. Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, pediatrician, was the first to raise concerns after finding an increase in mentally retarded patients. While cases of this scale are rarely heard of in the US, that does not mean it can not become a permanent topic in our future.

“It's something we should pay attention to. Our infrastructure is aging and we have not replaced pipes in our water systems in a timely manner and unfortunately that impacts low in-

come communities more so than others,” Claudia Benitez-Nelson, distinguished professor at The University of South Carolina School of Earth, Ocean, & Environment, said.

The community of Flint was neglected, despite numerous attempts to draw attention to the issue. Predominantly composed of African-Americans with a median household income far lower than the state average, the community was ignored by an unconcerned government.

“This is an issue that we will have to address sooner rather than later. We have issues here in Columbia, SC where we are already seeing, since we didn't keep up with some of the water systems, issues,” Benitez-Nelson said.

Following the flooding of 2015 and 2016, Columbia was faced with issues by the disaster. These small scale problems also exist in Oxford, MS where Jai Lyons and his family are often forced to refrain from using their water faucets.

“Sometimes we have to stop drinking water from our faucets because it's too dirty. It happens, but it's not as consent [as the issues in Flint, MI],” he said.

His family is forced to go to the store to buy bottled water and he thinks more people should be aware of the problem.

Problems like these typically

occur  
are

on a smaller level, where they ignored before they progress to a mass scale crisis. Modern day Americans have previously had the comfort of readily available water, but may be faced with problems such as  
third



Tommy Fairbairn hydrates after a walk down Main Street. He carried a water around all weekend for the SIPA convention.



world  
countries, if this issue is not addressed.

Benitez-Nelson urges students to engage in more dialogue, for they are the future.

“From an older perspective, those of you in high school and those that just started college are much more aware, much more active and much more knowledgeable about the issues than previous generations. I think it's really important for you to get the word out to people that these are issues we all have to deal with,” she said.