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Special to THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

That's the federal-aid label Mayor Bert Williams is seeking as 35 children are being treated for lead poisoning and apprehension mounts that the dimensions of the problem may be much larger.

The company refuses to discuss the case, but its attorneys have pounded away in the courtroom with the argument that the children could have been poisoned by eating paint chips or soil containing lead.

The city-county health unit here is proposing blood sampling of as many as 50,000 children under six years old to determine lead concentrations. The mayor of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, which is contiguous with El Paso's southern city limit, advised El Paso officials of plans for a similar blood-sampling project in his city. In addition New Mexico, which borders El Paso in the vicinity of the smelter, plans to send a public health team to El Paso next week to determine if atmospheric lead concentrations are affecting the New Mexico lower Rio Grande Valley. And the U.S. Public Health Service announced it intends to send a team to El Paso next week to begin sampling the lead in El Paso's atmosphere.

Whatever the outcome of the lawsuit, odds are that Smeltertown, currently the source of heated litigation and emotional strife, will soon be a ghost. Relocation housing has been provided for three of the families involved so the ailing children won't have to return to potentially hazardous conditions and environments.

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0000-NLI-000020699