

Editorial

An Open Door Is Reassuring

Doe Run Lead Co. is using an intriguing weapon to dispel fear and uncertainty about lead levels in the area surrounding the company's Herculanum smelter.

Information.

Last week, the company held a round of informational meetings with residents who live within a half-mile of the plant. The meetings, scheduled to be accessible to all—whether they work days or nights—were used to describe the company's environmental efforts, provide health information concerning lead, and to answer residents' concerns.

Also, the company announced it would begin a study to test soil and water at nearby residents' homes.

In an afternoon meeting with residents attended by a *Journal* reporter, one two-word phrase that is heard all too often in encounters with manufacturers was conspicuously absent—not once did company officials say, "No comment."

Doe Run has taken some pretty hard knocks lately on the environmental and work safety fronts. In February 1988, Doe Run was tagged with the third highest fine ever levied by the Occupational Safety Health Administration. And in April of this year, the Environmental Protection Agency rated Doe Run as the area's number one source of pollution.

A normal reaction when bad news hits big business is to do the turtle act: close up the shell and don't answer to knocks.

Doe Run is doing the opposite, making a real effort to employ an open door policy with the community.

"We feel it is good to open up dialogue with the community," Dan Vornberg, Doe Run's environmental manager, told residents at the meeting. "We want feedback from the community about everything—property purchases, pollution, odors, and the slag pile."

Residents took the company at its word and asked questions. Said resident Imogene Kasten, "I've lived here for 45 years, and this is the first time that I've seen this communication."

Let's hope Doe Run continues on the same road. It's refreshing—and effective.

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Contact: Frank Kane, (202) 219-8151

OSHA, Lead Industries Announce Voluntary Industry Initiative To Reduce Worker Exposures To Lead

Two industry organizations have voluntarily lowered lead exposure limits, reducing health hazards to thousands of American workers.

The voluntary lead industry initiative was jointly announced today by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Lead Industries Association, Inc. (LIA) and the Battery Council International (BCI), the two organizations that developed the program.

"Industry should better protect the health of its own workers," said Robert B. Reich, secretary of labor. "This is exactly the type of initiative and cooperation we want to foster between OSHA and American business."

Representatives of 33 companies, the vast majority of members of the two associations, have agreed to the program. The companies have 20,000 workers in such industries as battery manufacturing, lead smelting, lead chemicals, fabrication using lead, and solder manufacturing. Lead poisoning can have reproductive and neurological effects on workers.

Under OSHA's current lead standard, employers are required to relocate a worker subject to exposure above the airborne action level of 30 micrograms per cubic meter of air (30 ug/m³) to an area of lower lead exposure when the worker's average blood lead concentration is at or above 50 micrograms per 100 grams of whole blood (50ug/100g). The primary objective of the new program is to reduce this medical removal level from 50ug/100g to 40 ug/100g over the next five years.

Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Joseph A. Dear, who administers OSHA, said the program responds to OSHA's efforts to find ways of improving worker health through voluntary industry action.

"This initiative by the lead industry will contribute to improving the health of exposed workers and to foster an atmosphere of cooperation between the industry and OSHA. OSHA supports its implementation," Dear said.

Robert J. Muth, chairman of the LIA and vice president of ASARCO, Inc., said, "The program represents an effort by the lead industry to take a leadership role in worker protection in cooperation with OSHA."

"Within five years, we aim to have 100 percent of our battery workers' blood lead levels below 40 ug/100g," said Graham G. Spurling, president of BCI and president and CEO of GNB Technologies. "The industry will aggressively pursue these program objectives because our goal is not just to meet regulations, but to go beyond what's required."

John Baranski, chairman of the BCI Health Committee and vice president of Exide Corp., said, "The program will not be easy to implement and will involve the need for additional resources from the lead industry, including battery companies, but we feel the extra margin of safety provided to employees will justify the effort of those companies participating."

In addition to reducing the blood lead level triggering worker relocation, the program would reduce the blood lead level above which they may not be returned to work from 40 ug/100g (the current standard) to 35 ug/100g over the five-year period.

The level for medical removal will be reduced at the rate of 2 ug/100g each year until the five-year target of 40 ug/100g is reached and the level for return to work will be reduced by 1 ug/100g per year until the five-year target of 35 ug/100g is reached.

The industry groups will give OSHA annual data indicating the progress made by their members in achieving the target levels set forth in the proposal. The plant-specific data will include pre-proposal baseline data and annual blood lead data and zinc protoporphyrin levels for each work position and work shift monitored. It also will include the number of workers placed on medical removal during the reporting period, the number returned to work during the period, and a brief description of the lead operations performed by reported workers.

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