

FDA Seeks Less Lead In Foods

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WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration has announced a "priority program" to cut down levels of lead in canned baby and infant food. FDA said this past week it would also tell the industry that some adult canned foods show "undesirable high" lead content over the long term.

The agency announced results of a survey of 2,900 samples of 41 different foods produced during 1973.

"Of the (canned) baby foods, orange juice had the highest mean lead levels in canned juice have in the baby foods were applejuice, applesauce, and peaches . . . vegetables and beef, and mixed vegetables, had the lowest means."

Industry has told the FDA that lead levels in canned juice have dropped since the survey was made and are now about half of what they were during 1973, the agency reported.

"The overall results of the survey indicated that heavy metals in foods do not pose hazard to the American people," the FDA said, "though total lead intake in children who ingest lead from sources other than food could represent a potential problem."

Children tend to absorb more lead from food than do adults, it explained.

Lead in canned foods could come from the solder or other metal in the can.

The National Canners Assoc. and the Can Manufacturers Assoc. issued a statement saying they believe the industry is "continuing to make substantial progress" programs to reduce lead levels.

FDA said its priority program will be aimed at reducing still further lead concentrations in baby and infant food, and also at lowering lead levels in canned foods intended for adults but frequently eaten by children.

"In addition, the agency will inform industry that the current lead levels in some adult canned foods are undesirably high from a long-range public health perspective," it added.

Senate Passes Bill To Reduce Paint Lead

Washington — (AP) — A bill which would sharply reduce the amount of lead allowed in formulating interior paints in attempting to prevent lead poisoning passed the Senate yesterday and was sent to the House.

The measure would carry the government's three-year-old poison-prevention program through Sept. 30, 1978 at a cost of \$91.8 million.

Lead Paint
By a vote of 106 to 79, the House passed a bill requiring the Department of Environmental Resources and Health to establish programs to prevent lead paint poisoning.

Opponents of the bill argued that it would make persons who sold pieces of furniture, including those sold at auctions, liable for criminal actions if a lead paint poisoning case developed as a result of the sale.

Use of lead-based paint has largely been abandoned, but many older pieces of furniture and rooms in older houses are covered with the paint, which can cause death if large quantities are taken in.

The bill goes to the Senate.

New Lead-Disease Data Spur U.S. to Ask Smelters to Tighten Controls on Exposure

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By JAMES C. HYATT

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON — Alarmed by new reports of lead disease among workers in Indianapolis, federal officials asked the lead-smelting industry to tighten measures to control exposures.

Researchers are particularly concerned by evidence suggesting that employers may be treating lead disease with drugs that reduce the blood's lead levels as an alternative to providing adequate controls of lead in the air.

Routine use of such chemicals to control blood lead levels "isn't a proper use of the drugs," declared Dr. Jack Butler, an official of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. He said the treatments have side effects including kidney damage. "We'd be concerned with the possibility that anybody would be using the drug in order to not carry out the proper environmental controls," he added.

The Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration last October proposed a new job-safety standard that would halve the permissible lead exposure level, currently 200 micrograms of lead in each cubic meter of air, averaged over eight hours.

New Guidelines

Although the new standard is still pending and public hearings haven't yet been conducted, the department over the weekend issued new guidelines for employers using lead to follow until permanent regulations are issued.

The guidelines essentially adopt the monitoring, medical surveillance and sanitation provisions of the proposed lead standard but aren't legally binding. Nonetheless, Dr. Morton Corn, Assistant Secretary of Labor for safety and health, said the guidelines will give employers "more detailed guidance as to the protective measures needed to prevent lead poisoning in workers."

His agency has inspected the two Indianapolis secondary smelting plants where the new evidence was uncovered and is monitoring "the progress of both in implementing feasible engineering and work-practice controls to reduce workplace levels of lead," he said. Both plants will be reinspected in March.

One of the smelters is operated by NL Industries Inc. of New York; the other is owned by Quemetco Inc., a unit of RSR Corp., Dallas.

Previous Efforts

The findings also raise questions about previous Labor Department efforts to clean up the two plants. Both were previously inspected in April 1973, leading to Labor Department citations for serious violations of the existing standard for permissible limits of lead in the air. Measurements at the industries plant in 1973 ranged from 800 micrograms to 36,800 micrograms, a department official said, and measurements at the

Quemetco plant ranged from 380 micrograms to 11,470 micrograms, both far exceeding the 200-microgram limit.

The two concerns were ordered to abate the hazard, but the Labor Department has continued to extend the deadline for reducing lead levels in the air. The latest study spurred the new inspection of the plants next month.

The federal agencies acted after receiving reports of studies made earlier this month in 154 hourly workers at the two plants by a team from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine's Environmental Sciences Laboratory in New York. The tests had been requested by officials of the United Steelworkers union, which represents the workers.

Dr. Irving Selikoff, the lab's director, said the tests are showing "a significant number of high blood lead" levels and that 31 of the workers so far have been notified and told to seek medical attention.

He said many of the workers had a history of lead colic, or abdominal pain "rather characteristic of lead poisoning," and that the researchers also found anemia and damage to the nerves and kidneys.

The kidney damage particularly worried the researchers, he said, because it can be related to "improper use" of chemical blood therapy to reduce blood lead levels. The treatment, called chelation, uses certain chemicals that react with the lead and allow it to be excreted.

History of Therapy

"We found that 71 of the workers had a history of having had chelation therapy," Dr. Selikoff said. "Some were on it at the time we saw them."

He emphasized that chelation is considered proper "as a means of treating acute lead poisoning. The problem is that the use of chelation therapy for long-term use, in lieu of adequate controls of exposure, is inappropriate. There are many adverse effects associated with such long-term use," Dr. Selikoff noted.

He said he didn't know whether such treatment was widely used in the lead industry and called it a "matter of very vigorous discussion" among industrial health experts.

Dr. Selikoff said officials of NL Industries had little comment during the recent tests. But he said Quemetco officials "offered us all their data, their blood tests. They are particularly anxious to learn as much as we do from this so in the future they have a clean operation." He said it was particularly disturbing to find "that a disease we've known for 100 years is still so very much with us."

The Mount Sinai team didn't take any measurements of lead exposures at the plants, which refine scrap lead for sale as lead alloys and oxides. The NL Industries lead plant employs 60 workers and the Quemetco plant employs 200.