

Lead Poisoning Scourge of the Ghetto Gets New Emphasis in Earth Week

By GARY BROOTEN
Of The Bulletin Staff

Don't talk to Penelope Jackson about environment.

She won't understand, and not only because Penny is not quite four years old.

Penny is a little "slow," as they say. Her mind is not quite right any longer.

Her environment has hurt Penny Jackson. For the rest of her life she — and society — will pay.

The particular kind of "pollution" that harmed the girl's brain is an old, familiar enemy in the decayed residential areas of all big cities—lead paint.

It is a known enemy, and the means to deal with it also are known.

Penelope Jackson is not her real name, but she is a real girl. She lives in public housing. She was poisoned by paint on the walls and woodwork. The paint contained a high concentration of lead.

Paint Outlined

As far as anyone can tell, that paint was applied to the publicly owned unit (and one other unit like it) since the city in 1966 passed an ordinance outlawing such paint.

Raymond Tyler, chief of the city's accident control program, said there was a "slip-up" in enforcing the law.

After doctors last fall confirmed Penny's lead poisoning, and Health Department sanitarians had taken paint samples to confirm the high-lead content, a district health official acted.

He wrote Penny's mother warning her to see that her children did not nibble on painted surfaces until the leaded paint could be removed. He issued an order to the landlord — the Philadelphia Housing Authority — to have it removed.

A Second Test

As a city agency, however, the Authority took the position that it was not subject to "orders" from other city agencies. Before acting, in insisted on having its own paint samples taken and tested. The result was delay.

Penny was back in the hazardous environment for weeks before the paint was removed early this year. (The Authority since has agreed to accept Health Department findings as to the lead content of paint in its units.)

There were 124 cases of confirmed lead poisoning in the city last year — the "tip of the iceberg," according to authorities who estimated that hundreds or even thousands of children have elevated levels of lead circulating in their blood.

Damages Noted

The confirmed cases have a high rate of brain damage, kidney damage or other lasting effects. The effects of high blood levels in children with no obvious symptoms are unknown; some doctors think they may contribute to mental stunting.

One child died from the poisoning last year and about 40 in the decade.

Most Victims Young

Most of the poisoning is in small children. Five out of six victims are between ages one and three, most of the rest under six. They are poisoned when they gnaw at window-sills or doorframes, or—more commonly in deteriorated housing—when they eat chips of paint or painted plaster lying on the floor.

Pica — the medical term for eating nonfood items—is common, according to Dr. Sidney Sussman of St. Christopher's Hospital. A survey of the hospital's North Philadelphia neighborhood where food is not plentiful, turned up one or more children with pica symptoms in nearly half the homes.

For more than two years, especially in the last eight months, some inner-city residents have prodded the city to expand its efforts to deal with the problem. Until recently, however, lead-paint poisoning has ranged low on department priority lists.

Action Impends

Now, in the heady atmosphere of Earth Week, there have been promises of action.

In an Earth Week statement released over the weekend, Mayor Tate declared that the city plans to intensify both its lead-paint control program and the rat control program.

At the same time, U. S. Sen. Richard S. Schweiker, announced plans to introduce legislation on the problem. (Several bills are in the House subcommittee on housing chaired by Philadelphia Democrat William P. Barrett. Companion bills also are in committee in the Senate.)

Tomorrow, City Hall Commissioner Dr. Norman R. Ingraham will hold his third meeting since last fall with community leaders interested in the problem.

The Program

He will outline a \$1.2 million proposal for expanded city efforts to find and treat children with elevated levels of lead in their blood and to get lead-paint hazards removed.

Basically, the plan calls for more visits by new health education aides, trained to interview parents about symptoms of lead poisoning, and paint. The aides will try to find "high risk" children, and inform parents about the problem.

A contract with St. Christopher's, Children's, Hahnemann and Presbyterian hospitals to perform blood tests on the high-risk children.

Ten more building inspectors in the Department of Licenses and Inspections and a program to train the entire force of inspectors in taking paint samples for lead analyses.

A system of advisory boards on lead-paint problems, one representing the medical profession, a second industry and trade groups and the third the community.

Bulletin Guided Tours

Guided tours of The Bulletin Building are available daily, except Sundays and Holidays, at 9, 10 and 11 A.M. and 1, 2, 3 and 4 P.M. Groups of more than ten should make reservations by calling EV 2-7600.

of age suspected of being victims of lead poisoning. The mobile units would cost, it was estimated, about \$25,000 each. It also involves an increase of "effective" city lead poisoning inspectors and inspectors inspecting and inspecting during routine painting.

Funds Called Insufficient To Cut Lead Paint Threat

By ORRIN C. EVANS
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City Health Commissioner Norman R. Ingraham agreed with representatives of 35 community and health organizations yesterday that a proposed budget of \$1.2 million is "insufficient" to eliminate lead poisoning among ghetto children.

During a three-hour conference in the Municipal Services Building, Dr. Ingraham said: "Because this group has indicated that this is unsatisfactory to immediately take care of this problem, I have agreed to modify the proposed program so that we may have sufficient funds to try to make this program operative."

Community Protest
He was referring to protests from community groups against a plan for control of lead poisoning proposed by the city administration.

The complainants charged at the meeting yesterday that a city ordinance passed in 1967 outlawing the use of leaded paint was not being enforced in the city's low-income areas.

There were figures cited which attributed a high incidence of deaths of children and of mental retardation caused by lead paint that had oiled from windows and door sills in apartments and homes.

Dr. Ingraham agreed regarding the authenticity of many of the figures.

"You have made quite valid points," he told the conference. He assured them he would alert members of City Council as to the seriousness of the problem when Council considers Mayor Tate's budget May 4.

Jonathan M. Stein, chief of the medical law reform unit of Community Legal Services, Inc., and spokesman for organizations seeking increased funds for control and elimination of lead poisoning, tried to pin Dr. Ingraham down as to what point he would take in painting for an increased budget from City Council.

Will Present Proposal
"I will present whatever is now prepared by your group to the city administration," he said. Presiding the point, Mrs. Roxanne Jones, chairman of the Voluntary Rights Organization, indicated that he commit himself to advocating acceptance of the group's proposed lead poisoning control plan before City Council.

"Are you scared?" asked Mrs. Jones.
"I'm not scared," he replied. "I am part of the administration, and I'll do what the administration wants."

"This program is going to be hard to get through," he said, "and we must have citizens' support." He told the conference that small children eating lead paint that had oiled from windows and door sills in apartments and homes.

Mobile Units
The program asks for mobile units to give blood tests for children from one to six years

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