

DRAFT -- 8/5/69

LEAD INDUSTRY RESPONSE TO
LEGISLATION AGAINST LEAD PAINTS

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The Lead Industries Association is entirely sympathetic with any groups' concern in attempting to solve the problem of children who are harmed by eating old leaded paint.

The lead industry has long recognized that improperly handled or used lead compounds can have ill effects on humans if excessive amounts are absorbed into their systems. However, since there is a need for lead in so many applications, the industry has pioneered in the development of programs designed to prevent conditions that could result in hazardous industrial over-exposures to lead. In addition, the ingestion of lead by children has been of particular concern.

There are three major factors concerning childhood lead poisoning:

First: The major source for lead poisoning are the older areas of our nation's cities -- often slums -- where children, mostly under five years old, are exposed to old lead paint applied to the interior of buildings more than 30 years ago. Today, interior paints do not contain toxic amounts of lead. Thus, present day paints and painting practices are not a problem. The problem is to prevent children from chewing on, or eating, the flaked lead paint which was applied many years ago.

Second: Some 90 percent of all lead-based paints presently manufactured are used for such purposes as corrosion protection for bridges, highway structures, and the bright yellow divider lines which prevent accidents on the nation's highways. These do not constitute a hazard for children.

Third: Any consideration of a ban on the sale of all lead-based paints will not solve the childhood lead intoxication problem because this stems from paints no longer in use. Such prohibitions and restrictions, if enacted, would be undesirable as well as detrimental to public safety. Legislation is not the

answer to the ingestion of old leaded paint by children. However, if legislative action is believed desirable to emphasize the avoidance of lead-based paints in dwellings, action should be directed toward paints used on interiors only -- not all lead-based paints.

Since the 1920's, the lead industry has sponsored scientific and medical research to learn more about health effects of lead ingestion and absorption, to find better ways of preventing lead over-exposures, and to develop new and more effective methods of diagnosis and treatment of lead intoxication. The Lead Industries Association's Health and Safety program is devoted to helping lead producers, lead users, and others in preventing exposures that could result in lead intoxication. The result has been considerable progress in the elimination or reduction of practically all industrial and accidental lead absorption cases -- with one major exception.

That exception is the eating or chewing of old lead paint by children in the slum areas of major cities, mostly in the midwest and east. Despite many years of effort -- going back to the thirties -- the problem still exists in some cities. However, remarkable progress has been made in many cities to bring the problem under control and to reduce or eliminate deaths or serious disability resulting from lead paint eating.

The problem is simple. Unfortunately, the solution is not. In many dwellings, particularly those in run-down areas, the paint applied many years ago on the walls or window sills or other trimmings still contains lead. And some of this flakes off. Some small children may chew on the paint or eat the paint chips. If they do this continually over a period of time -- authorities say about three months -- they accumulate enough lead to result in serious illness.

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Many cities with large slum areas have active programs trying to do these important things:

1. To remove the old lead paint from places where children can get at it to eat.
2. To keep children from getting at any paint chips that may contain lead. This calls for parents or baby sitters to make sure that peeling paint is kept cleaned up and that children are kept from chewing on old paint surfaces.
3. To encourage physicians, public health, social workers, community action groups, and parents to be on the alert for signs of lead poisoning in children and to provide prompt and adequate treatment.

But it is essential to emphasize that the sources of this lead paint problem are in the past. New paints are not involved. Most importantly, as was mentioned earlier, some 90 percent of lead-based paints are entirely devoted to essential industrial uses.

When the fact that children were eating the old lead paint chips became known and understood, the lead and paint industries cooperated in developing the American Standards Association Code on Interior Paints which requires that all paints for home interiors contain no toxic lead.

But there is protection beyond these paint standards too. White leaded paints for exterior use are expensive compared with the modern non-lead paints made especially for interior work. They are harder to apply. They take longer to dry -- several days as compared with a few hours or less. And there is no question but that they are smelly and annoying. For these reasons alone, neither professional nor amateur interior painters use the lead-based paints -- even if they were available -- when he has the modern, cheaper and more easily applied interior paints.

There is no question that old paint is the source of the problem. In the publication "Lead Poisoning in Children," published by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, it is stated

that lead poisoning was not found among children in newly constructed housing projects in New York City, even when these were in districts which had a high incidence of childhood lead intoxication.

"This indicates," reports the Government publication, "that lead poisoning in children is inextricably linked to old, dilapidated housing."

This observation was further confirmed by a study in Cleveland which is cited by Dr. J. J. Chisolm of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine -- one of the nation's authorities on childhood lead poisoning. A Cleveland study of 801 young children in old housing showed that 38 children, or 4.7 percent, had "plumbism" -- the medical term for lead intoxication. But of the 105 children studied who lived in a new housing project, no case of plumbism was found.

The Lead Industries Association has been cooperating with many city health departments which are conducting programs to keep children from eating these old lead paints.

The association recently published a Facts Bulletin on Lead and Pediatrics that deals directly and extensively with this problem. This has been distributed free of charge to public health doctors, nurses, social workers, and others concerned with coping with this childhood problem. The lead industry supports and encourages intensive and well-planned programs designed to remove the old lead paint, and to keep children from eating it. This is where the solution of the problem lies. Legislation relating to new paints, and especially legislation that would apply to the necessary industrial and outdoor protective paints, will not contribute to the solution of the childhood lead poisoning problem. It would be a disservice to the public to suggest that any such ban is even a partial solution.

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