

Placards Decry Horrors

100 Jam Hearing on Paint Poisoning

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Spectator galleries in council chambers in City Hall on Wednesday were packed with more than 100 restless people. Many held up placards with slogans decrying the horrors of lead paint poisoning.

They wanted something done about a threat to health that hits hardest in the city's impoverished areas and takes its toll among residents of older housing in Frankford, Logan and Germantown.

They were there to hear City Health Commissioner Dr. Norman R. Ingraham, present his department's budget dealing with control of lead poisoning.

DRY RECITAL

Comments and reactions by the spectators to most statements packed an otherwise dry recital of facts and figures with dramatic tension.

Dr. Ingraham had a request for \$182,779 in his basic budget to combat lead poisoning. Under questioning he said a total program, possibly spread over several years, would cost more like \$1.2 million.

A fact sheet prepared by the Health Department to show the justification for control of lead poisoning contained a map showing a belt across the city's waist bounded on the north by Allegheny ave. and on the south by Wharton st.

338 CASES REPORTED

Within the belt 338 cases of lead paint poisoning were reported in the last five years.

The map also showed that sections of Philadelphia north of Allegheny ave. were not without trouble.

There were 76 cases in Tioza and Logan during the same period; 42 cases in West Oak Lane and Germantown and six in Frankford.

South of Wharton st. the map showed 50 cases in South Philadelphia, east of the Schuylkill, and 33 in Southwest Philadelphia.

AFFECTS CHILDREN

Lead-paint poisoning, which has a peculiar tendency to affect children between the ages of one and six, is a phenomenon that most public health authorities thought was laid to rest years ago when lead was ruled out as a basic substance for paint.

It is only recently that the authorities became aware that the menace had come back to life.

"It is only within the last year that we have had full scientific data," said Dr. Ingraham.



DR. NORMAN INGRAHAM
Tells of poison threat

The health commissioner was chided during the hearing for not getting a program to combat lead paint poisoning going as long ago as January when there was full awareness of the dangers.

Dr. Ingraham explained that only one of the nation's major cities, Baltimore, had stayed awake to the dangers of lead paint poisoning over the years.

Baltimore's program, now 35 years old and kept up to date, is being used as a model for other cities.

D'ORTONA IRRITATED

"We are modeling our program after Baltimore's program," Dr. Ingraham said. "We are also studying a fine program in Chicago."

This drew an impatient response from Council President Paul D'Ortona.

"I don't care about Baltimore and Chicago and Los Angeles and every place else," he said. "I want to know what is being done in Philadelphia."

DEMONSTRATE APPROVAL

The statement drew a small demonstration of approval from the gallery.

D'Ortona said the city needs a "lead poison program."

"We are not looking for headlines," he said. "We know the situation is bad. We want to know if even the \$1.2 million is sufficient."

He said that in his 20 years in City Council he noticed that the Health Department always got all the money it requested.

"And we've always had to transfer money out of the Health Department because it wasn't used," he added.

Councilman Edgar C. Campbell wanted to know why the health commissioner

wasn't giving the lead paint problem a higher priority than he seemed to be doing.

"We are using all the methods at our disposal," Dr. Ingraham said. "The only additional thing would be to have mass blood testing of all the children in the affected areas."

Councilman Isidore Bellis was concerned that all the cases are not being reported and called for a greater liaison between the Department of Licenses and Inspections, which checks housing for substandard conditions, and the Health Department.

NOT BEING DONE

"This is not being done," Bellis said.

Lead paint poisoning, Dr. Ingraham said during his testimony, is a peculiarity of old houses. Since little or no lead-based paint is used on interiors any more, the danger exists in houses painted before the lead base was legislated out of existence.

"The newer paint cracks away and exposes the lead-based undercoating," he said. There are also cases where small children chew on something and get down to the lead base.

The Health Department's

program in Dr. Ingraham's written report include:

— Home visits for intensive education.

— Blood testing of children from one to six years old.

— Massive investigation by 60 inspectors of every dwelling in high risk areas.

— Five three-man teams to remove paint where prompt action is needed.

— Intensive surveillance and enforcement of codes.

— Employment of unemployed people in a crash program.

Council and lead poisoning

The Philadelphia Health Department's plan to curb lead paint poisoning among children doesn't come before Council with a bargain basement price tag. It seeks \$2,778,382 for fiscal 1971. There is also an additional \$700,000 for licenses and inspections campaign for lead paint removal. MAY 10 1970

Proposed is a massive investigation, enforcement treatment and abatement complex of activities in the four health districts within the so-called "lead belt" striding the city's older sections, as well as selected high risk areas elsewhere. The proposed complex of activities boils down to screening a minimum of 45,000 children annually and eliminating lead paint from about 80,000 dwelling units annually for a period of five years. While it seems obvious that Council is not likely to view the costs of controlling childhood lead paint poisoning sympathetically, these should not lead to out-of-hand rejection. The cost of caring for victims is also high, apart from the suffering involved. Lead paint poisoning is called "the silent epidemic" because physicians as well as parents are seldom aware of the scope and magnitude of the problem. Yet the handicaps — mental retardation, kidney disease, blindness — are serious. What's more, the degree of their severity may be correlated with the duration of exposure. However Council disposes of the Health Department's proposal, which has the additional disadvantage of being presented as a supplement to the health budget, it can not in good conscience ax it altogether. The public health dangers would not justify that, although the city's financial straits may force scaling.