

Lead Poisoning is a modern industrial hazard found in 52 occupations and 54 industries. An estimated 160,000 workers in Pennsylvania are exposed to this hazard.

Known as an industrial poison for over one hundred years, lead may be absorbed by breathing the dust, by eating food which has come in contact with lead, or through the skin. Manufacturing and smelting of lead, manufacturing of storage batteries and paints, painting and printing are common sources of lead poisoning.

Lead poisoning may have several different results. It may cause loss of appetite at first, later indigestion and "lead" or "painters colic"—severe stomach cramps. It may attack the nervous system causing paralysis of the muscles used most. If the forearm becomes weakened, it is called "wrist drop." The "grip test" is a common method of determining whether a worker is poisoned. Similar paralysis may attack other muscles. If the brain is affected, inflammation may cause death. Often internal organs are affected and death or disability results from them directly—lead poisoning being the real cause. It is generally believed that after recovering from lead poisoning, the worker should leave the industry. Studies show he generally remains.

In the plants surveyed, conditions could have been much improved with a resulting reduction in exposure. Furnace operations were not always well hooded with properly constructed and adequately powered exhaust fans. Cracks in floors contained lead oxide which entered the air as dust—particularly when dry swept instead of being wet swept.

Lead oxides were dried in the open shop. Clothes worn at work were not left in the plant to be laundered. If clothing was changed, the street clothing was not protected from dust. In many cases lunches were eaten without hands being carefully washed, and daily showers were exceptional.

European lead industries have reduced their injuries to a minimum. The conclusion of those making the survey was that great reduction was possible here through efforts of both employers and employees. Occupational disease compensation should be an incentive to that end.

