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FDA Adopts 0.06 Lead Limitation, Effective Jan. 1, 1974—Industry Ponders Fate

Washington, D.C., March 14 — The Coatings industry today still was shaking from the action March 10 of the Food and Drug Administration in banning all except trace amounts of lead in paint by the end of 1973. It also was speculating that the current Senate consideration of a lead-banning bill might lean toward adoption within that body of perhaps even more stringent legislation.

The FDA ordered reduction of lead in paint to five tenths of one per cent by January 1, 1973, and to 0.06 per cent by the end of 1973. Of special significance was the fact that, as adopted, the regulation applies to all paints or coatings used around the

household — which means interior or exterior.

Sub-chapter D of Title 21—Food and Drugs, the section in which the regulation is now included, contains the following descriptive phrase: "Any paint or other similar surface coating material intended, or packaged in a form suitable, for use in or around the household."

Paint industry spokesmen said the federal action would lead to increased prices of paint and might force many retailers and small manufacturers out of business.

Meanwhile, Robert A. Roland, executive vice president of the National Paint and Coatings Association, told a Senate

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Subcommittee March 9 that reducing the allowable lead content of household paints to 0.06 per cent "will do nothing toward correcting the present, identified and real causes of lead poisoning in children today."

Testifying before the Subcommittee on Health of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Mr. Roland identified pre-World War II paints, containing more than 50 per cent white lead, as the major cause of today's lead poisoning problem. It is "most unfortunate," he added, "that the subject of lead in modern paints seems to be getting more attention today from the Congress, the Federal agencies and many public health officials than the real problem."

Existing causes of lead poisoning can be corrected, Mr. Roland said, if funds are provided to: (1) medically screen and treat pre-school age children in the inner city; (2) remove or seal off old paint containing excessive lead levels from low-cost and ghetto dwellings; and (3) conduct research to determine scientifically a safe content for lead in paints. Explaining that there is pres-

ently insufficient data showing that the use of 1.0 per cent lead—now used in modern interior paints—is hazardous, the NPCA executive stressed that to reduce the lead level to 0.06 per cent would be to "condemn" a product which "has never been tested!"

He termed a "common misconception" the belief that all manufacturers can easily remove the lead from their products. "The problem of removing all but trace amounts of lead from paint is a monumental one indeed," he stated. To reach the 0.06 per cent lead level, manufacturers would have to use "pharmaceutical-type" analysis of all their raw materials. "What all this could easily add up to is poorer performing products, costing more money to manufacture, and consequently, more to buy in the market place."

Calling the 0.06 per cent standard almost impossible to enforce, Mr. Roland explained that much money and effort could be spent by Federal, state, and local officials in "trying to enforce an unreasonable lead limit that has, in no instance, been shown to be necessary for safety."

The Answer May Be Within Reach

A strong potential exists that work done 20 years ago by Dr. Raymond R. Myers, now head of the chemistry department at Kent State University and director of Paint Research Institute, will lead to help in furnishing driers to replace lead and to overcoming loss-of-dry problems.

Dr. Myers in 1953 reported development of amines with double-bound nitrogen, known as Schiff-bases, that serve as a complexing agent with manganese to create driers that are fast and through-drying.

The trouble is that they have never been put completely through the full commercial-developments routine, with test fences, shelf-life determinations, methods of formulation, and all the other steps

necessary before paint companies can put them on the market without fear of wrecking the integrity of their good names. (At the time of discovery, the industry didn't need them. Now it may.)

These amine complexing agents have one thing in common with α -phenanthroline, the through-dry aid mentioned previously—both have double-bound nitrogen in the molecule. The difference is that phenanthroline has its nitrogen present in an aromatic configuration and Dr. Myer's discovery is aliphatic.

Dr. Myers estimates that a full-fledged development program for the material, utilizing existing research facilities, would require a minimum of a year.

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