# Lead Law—Not Liking It But Living With It

COMING as a pleasant surprise are the reports from Chicago just 30 days after the nation's toughest paint lead-limit law went into effect. Despite some doomsaying from several quarters earlier that the drastic restrictions might put the paint industry out of business in Chicago, it really wasn't nearly as bad as all that.

The manufacturers, who are taking most of the loss in Chicago, and the dealers, who are more inconvenienced than out of pocket (see story on Page 30), were both managing to live with the law even though obviously they don't like it.

Up to the last, there was optimism regarding the Chicago deadline. Surely some postponement would be allowed. Manufacturers and dealers planned accordingly, as trade associations took the necessary legal steps toward a reprieve. But the blow fell right on schedule.

Looking back now, it's easy to see that all the political winds pointed toward a continuing government storm for business, the paint industry included. The big soap manufacturers had recently lost a battle to get Chicago to ease up on its phosphate legislation. The even bigger auto makers failed to get a one-year stay of the tough 1975 federal emissions standards.

Hindsight is 20-20, and now it's obvious that belated efforts by the industry for research to scientifically establish the safe limits of metals in paint are too little too late.

The national dealer organization, while declaring that it was business as usual, failed to win its request for an 15-month delay in federal regulations for retailers to move non-conforming paint off their shelves.

So it's tough lead laws, and already manufacturers and dealers are conforming. Such times test men's mettle and also can draw them closer together. This is how it is in Chicago, where suppliers are taking back from dealers the non-conforming merchandise, allowing full credit in most cases. Dealers generally are agreeable to accepting replacement merchandise that conforms rather than asking that the credit be applied to their accounts. That latter course could be ruinous to suppliers.

We would repeat the pessimistic advice of our editorial of May 1972: "It's urgent for all in the industry to get their operations into line with the most severe possible interpretation of the new regulation. The dealer should buy paint very carefully now. He should buy no more lead paint than he can surely move before deadline and it should be code-marked to make sure it moves out in time."

On the more optimistic side, we are cheered by the response of the industry to these trying times. This provides a revealing insight of the resilience and strength of the industry, prompting the conclusion that while it won't be business as usual for awhile yet, there will be a paint business today, tomorrow, and from now on.