

March 2, 1970

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To The Editor
New York Times

Scare headlines and misleading statements may arouse unwarranted concern among the public but they will do little to solve the technically complex problem of reducing air pollution.

I am referring to the February 26 article headlined "Peril Detected in Lead Skies - - Study Warns Concentration of Metal Nears Crisis." Despite the suggestion in the headlines and the story itself, there is no connection between the "lead skies", descriptive only of color, and ground-level measurements of lead in the ambient air.

More importantly, however, the article, based on measurements reported by Dr. T. Chow taken in San Diego, California, was misleading in comparison of figures. The story related Dr. Chow's report of finding as high as eight micrograms per cubic meter of air during weekly periods in downtown San Diego as compared to the proposed air quality guide of ten micrograms per cubic meter averaged over thirty days. But the Times story omitted the very significant - and key phrase that I have emphasized - - "averaged over thirty days."

It is also of importance that the American Industrial Hygiene Association in proposing this figure in 1969 stated specifically that: "There are no instances or cases of toxicity reported as the result of lead in the ambient air." In recommending the value of ten micrograms per cubic meter averaged over 30 days, the AIAA's Community Air Quality Guide noted that this was low enough to be "designed for long-term health protection." Also, the Guide said: "Authorities are agreed that the possibility of acute exposure to large amounts of lead in the outdoor air is not real..."

Set in this perspective, it becomes clear that even if the report of eight micrograms per cubic meter is correct for unusual conditions, such as peak traffic periods during atmospheric inversions, this does not constitute a "crisis" situation, as reported in the Times story.

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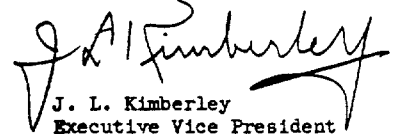
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Both the Federal government and the State of California take continuing measurements of lead in the ambient air (which may get there from a number of sources, including dusts from soils containing lead). Measurements since 1955 have shown annual averages of well under 2 micrograms per cubic meter for the city of San Diego through 1967, and preliminary data suggests this average has not changed significantly one way or another since.

The lead industry, as well as a number of health agencies, including the U. S. Public Health Service, has continuing research on the question of lead in the atmosphere and the control and reduction of air pollution. However, there is a distinction between emissions and pollutants. This was pointed up by Bureau Of Mines research which tested leaded and non-leaded gasolines of comparable quality. Although the emissions of the two fuels were similar, the Bureau found that the unleaded gasoline emissions were such that "the pollution effect was increased by as much as 25 percent," compared with leaded gasolines. This in itself is a warning to those who believe removing lead from gasoline will solve the automotive pollution problem.

We bring these facts to your attention because it is essential that decisions and actions to improve the quality of our air be made on the basis of sound and solid technical knowledge and on needed priorities.

Sincerely,


J. L. Kimberley
Executive Vice President

JLK:bl
cc: David Bird
John Noble Wilford

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