

BEST News

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Historic Shift in Lead Poisoning Prevention Policy

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) formally accepted the recommendations from its Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention to respond to lower level exposures and eliminate the term "level of concern". The agency will now recommend follow-up for children with elevated blood lead levels above a reference value representing the top 2.5% of all children in the U.S. That level is currently 5 ug/dl but, the agency has agreed to update this every four years. This is the first substantive change in the agency's guidance on blood lead levels since 1991.



Perry Gottesfeld, Executive Director of OK International said, "That CDC's statement represents a historic shift that is long overdue." He co-chaired the sub-committee that drafted these recommendations along with Dr. Deborah Cory-Slechta at the University of Rochester School of Medicine. Gottesfeld said that "approximately 450,000 children in the U.S. have blood lead levels above this reference value, and we estimate that globally several hundred million children are suffering from higher exposures -- primarily in developing countries."

In a letter to the CDC on May 14, 27 members of Congress had urged the agency to disregard politics and budgetary constraints and adopt these recommendations. On May 16, 2012, the CDC published their official response to the Committee in which they concur in principle with all 13 recommendations. However, the budget for the agency's childhood lead poisoning prevention program has been cut by 94% in the current fiscal year. CDC's full response can be viewed here: http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/ACCLPP/CDC_Response_Lead_Exposure_Recs.pdf

OK International Working to Prevent Lead Poisoning from Gold Mining in Nigeria



Typical Mine in Nigeria

OK International has been working with the Nigerian Sustainable Management of Minerals Resources Project to identify hazards at artisanal and small-scale mining and processing sites. The project was initiated after hundreds of children died of lead poisoning in a gold mining community in Zamfara State beginning in 2010. We collected soil samples at four gold mines and two lead mines in four states. In addition, we conducted a three-day training session for government staff and NGOs on conducting evaluations of mining sites with the goal of increasing the capacity to prevent future disasters.

Having identified significant lead contamination in a gold processing area outside of Zamfara, we fear that the true extent of this problem has yet to be fully uncovered.

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In May, Perry Gottesfeld, made a presentation at an international conference on the ongoing lead poisoning situation in Zamfara organized by Doctors Without Borders in conjunction with the Nigerian Ministry of Health on safer mining practices. Many at the conference highlighted the need to implement improved practices for small-scale artisanal miners to reduce exposures and environmental contamination.



Perry Gottesfeld addressing the International Conference on Lead Poisoning Prevention in Abuja, Nigeria, May 2012



Processing Ore in Nigeria



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Cameroon Lead Paint Elimination Update

Perry Gottesfeld joined our partners from CREPD last month in Yaoundé, Cameroon for the second national workshop on the elimination of lead paint. The meeting brought together representatives from key government ministries, NGOs, and experts from medical schools to assess progress and plan for future activities.

We have made considerable progress over the last year in this ongoing project to eliminate lead in paint in Cameroon. The largest paint manufacturer in that country, Seigneurie, is owned by the U.S. Company PPG -- one of the world's largest paint companies. PPG has recently agreed to remove lead paint from their architectural paints and to place labels on these products to indicate the lead content. However, they are continuing to manufacture industrial and auto paints with lead.

The Cameroon government's standards agency (ANOR) has also launched a technical committee to develop a mandatory standard for lead in paint. The standard is expected to be completed in 2012.

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Second National Workshop on Lead Paint Elimination in Cameroon, April 2012

From left to right: Mr. Delor Magellan Kamseu Kangaing (Cameroon Consumers League), Dr. Francisca Monebenimp (Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, University of Yaoundé I), Dr. Samuel Tetsopgang (Programme Manager, CREPD) and Dr. Gilbert Kuepou (Executive Director, CREPD)

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OK International Presents at EV Industry Conference

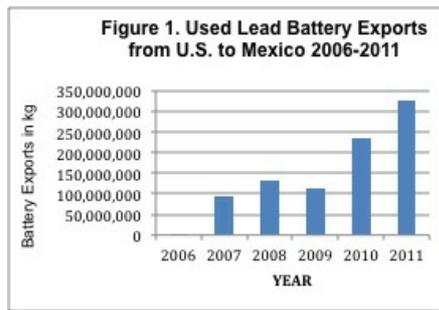
Perry Gottesfeld made a presentation at the Electric Vehicles (EV), Land, Sea, and Air Conference, held in San Jose on the March 27-28. Mr. Gottesfeld told industry representatives that batteries pose the greatest challenge to the EV industry's claims of environmental sustainability in his talk entitled "Are Green Electric Vehicles Reliant on Polluting Battery Technology?" Currently lead batteries dominate the market because of the large number of electric bikes in China where they are causing a serious threat to public health due to poor manufacturing and recycling practices. Lithium ion batteries, which are expected to be the technology of choice in the U.S. can not be economically recycled to generate raw materials for new batteries. Given that many of these batteries are in the range of 500 to 600 pounds (kgs), there is a huge potential downside.

In addition, there are other concerns in manufacturing these batteries. Most lithium ion manufacturers use significant quantities of hazardous solvents including NMP, which has been shown to have reproductive effects in rodents. See a summary of Perry's presentation, including recommendations for improved sustainability at <http://www.idtechex.com/events/presentations/are-green-electric-vehicles-reliant-on-polluting-battery-technology-003160.asp>

U.S. Exporting More Used Lead Batteries

The upward trend over the past five years in used battery exports from the U.S. to Mexico continued with a 38% increase from 2010 to 2011. This increase follows the 112% increase in 2010 from the previous year (see Figure 1). Total US exports to all countries increased more than 70% from 260,256,497 in 2010 to 444,120,527 in 2011. Nearly half of the additional exports went to Mexico, but there was also a big increase in exports to over 30 additional developing countries.

As we mentioned in the last issue of BEST News, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) announced in February that it had begun an independent investigation of the environmental and public health issues associated with trans-boundary movement and recycling of lead batteries. This investigation is ongoing and they are now soliciting input from interested parties. If you are interested in providing comments, see instructions at: http://www.cec.org/Page.asp?PageID=122&ContentID=25201&SiteNodeID=655&BL_ExpandID=&AA_SiteLanguageID=1



U.S. exports of used lead batteries to Mexico continue to grow and the largest exporter is the U.S. battery manufacturer, Johnson Controls. Please help by signing this petition to Johnson Controls that was initiated by a child in second grade who took this on for a school project. <https://www.change.org/petitions/johnson-controls-battery-group-inc-stop-unsafe-lead-battery-recycling-in-mexico-2>

New Lead Content Restrictions for Products in Europe

The European Registration, Evaluation, and Authorization of Chemicals (REACH) regulation may soon include new restrictions on consumer products containing lead. The EC member states recently approved an annex proposed by the French that restricts lead in jewelry to less than 50 ppm. The EC is also considering cutting the lead limits for toys, which are currently 160 ppm in material scraped off of toys, 13.5 ppm in powdery or pliable toy materials, and 3.4 ppm in liquid or sticky toy materials. In addition, the Swedish chemicals agency (Kemi) is proposing the inclusion of furniture, clothing, and other items intended for children in response to data indicating that there is no safe level of lead.

German Chemical Giant, BASF, Pressured to Stop Making Lead Pigments

BASF, one of the world's largest chemical companies, has announced that it will stop the manufacture of certain lead pigments used in paints and other products by the end of 2014. BASF is currently manufacturing these pigments at its plant in Besigheim, Germany. It appears that the company is taking this action in response to changes in REACH restrictions on lead-containing pigments that will become effective in May 2015. The company's product information available on their web site downplays the risk of lead exposure from products with these pigments despite acknowledging that "the whole general population including children" may come into contact with it. They note that the concentration of lead in industrial paints in which lead pigments are used ranges from 5 to 40 percent by weight. Workers often apply these paints in a fine spray mist and can be over exposed.

Launch of EU-Switch Asia Lead Paint Elimination Project

Perry Gottesfeld of OK International recently joined our IPEN partners in Manila to launch the Lead Paint Elimination Project funded by the European Union's SWITCH-Asia Programme. The project will involve NGO partners in seven Asian countries and contribute to global efforts aimed at the elimination of lead paint. Its overall objective is to reduce childhood lead poisoning in Bangladesh, India, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia and Nepal. OK International will work with partner NGOs in establishing a third-party paint certification and labeling program. We will also provide technical advice in support of paint testing and other project activities.

Lung Cancer, Silicosis and Tuberculosis Risk from Silica Exposure

The Lancet Oncology Journal recently published a story about research from China that has added to the literature supporting an association between silica dust exposure and an increased risk of tuberculosis and lung cancer. Their coverage of the story included a quote from Perry Gottesfeld of OK International regarding the magnitude of the silica problem in the developing world and the outdated standards for silica exposure in both the US and China. The article also mentioned Gottesfeld's published work from 2008 on the reduction of silica dust exposures using spray mist technology. [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045\(12\)70181-X/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045(12)70181-X/fulltext)

China Lead Poisoning Incidents

Mass lead poisoning caused by the lead battery industry and smelters in China has continued into 2012 with three more incidents reported in communities around smelters. More than 160 children were poisoned in Guangdong Province and over 100 children were poisoned in Guanxi Province. Over 50 workers were recently poisoned at a smelter in Gansu Province. We also noted reports of an incident that occurred in 2011 in Lingbao, where 87% of the children have elevated blood lead levels. Numerous smelters and lead battery plants throughout China were either closed or ordered to make improvements as a result of these poisonings. See our updated list of incidents at <http://www.okinternational.org/docs/Mass%20Lead%20poisonings%20April%202012.pdf>

Johnson Controls Cited By OSHA for Violations of the Lead Standard

Johnson Controls, the world's largest manufacturer of lead-acid batteries was cited by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for 11 health violations following an inspection on October 25, 2011 to address lead exposures at the plant. OSHA found the company had serious and "willful violations" due to improper cleanup practices, inadequate personal protective equipment, insufficient air monitoring, and repeat citations for exceeding the permissible exposure limit (PEL) and inadequate housekeeping procedures. Workers were reportedly exposed to airborne lead at over 200 ug/m3 exceeding the limit by over 400 percent. The total of the proposed fines was \$188,600 and triggered mandatory follow-up inspections to ensure future compliance. More information on these citations is available at: http://www.osha.gov/oc/citations/JohnsonControlBatteryGroup_108096_0424_12.pdf

In the past Johnson Controls has claimed "the health and safety of our employees at all of our locations, including those in the United States and Mexico, are at world-class levels for manufacturing operations among all industries." (See <http://bit.ly/GJriV>) Clearly this action by OSHA leaves such claims in doubt. In March the company announced that they are increasing prices by 8 percent to account for more stringent air standards in the U.S. and anticipated changes in permissible employee lead exposure levels. The company's plant in Shanghai was closed last year by the Chinese authorities due to lead poisoning in the surrounding community.

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