

BEST News

Better Environmental Sustainability Targets (BEST)

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China Ramps Up Exports of Tetraethyl Lead

Given that the ban on the use of lead additives in gasoline has been in place in the U.S. since the 1970s, it may surprise you to learn that the U.S. is using over 5,700 metric tons of tetraethyl lead per year primarily for aviation fuel. In fact most small, single-engine aircraft use lead fuel despite research that has shown elevated lead levels among children in the vicinity of small airstrips.

In the past most of the tetraethyl lead used for this fuel was imported from the UK, however, in recent years China has become a significant new supplier. In fact imports from China have grown from none in 2008 to account for approximately 17% of all US consumption in 2011.

Tetraethyl lead is one of the most hazardous forms of lead since it is readily absorbed through the skin. The production of this chemical has historically been associated with lead poisoning among workers.

Although efforts to finally stop the use of lead as a fuel additive have been debated for some time, it is not expected that U.S. EPA will ban it any time soon. Friends of the Earth had filed a lawsuit in 2012 to force the EPA to act.

IPEN Coalition to Eliminate Lead Paint Meets in Sri Lanka



Chemical Storage at a Sri Lankan Paint Factory

Perry Gottesfeld of OK International attended a meeting in Sri Lanka of seven Asian country NGO partners working under an IPEN project funded by the EU to eliminate the use of lead paint (http://www.ipen.org/ipenweb/work/lead/lead_paint.html). The project is meeting with considerable success as several of the participants indicated that their home countries are developing regulations to restrict the use of lead paints.

NGO partners from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Philippines came together for this meeting. The workshop provided skill sharing and capacity building on a range of topics including lead paint testing, voluntary certification programs, and regulations on lead paint.

While in Sri Lanka, Perry also spoke at a workshop attended by many of the small paint companies in the country and visited one of their plants that had recently switched over to formulations without added lead. The owner of this plant emphasized the ease by which they were able to reformulate their product without the need for any new equipment or other capital expenditure. He did indicate that they had to absorb an increase of 1-2% in raw material prices for lead-free pigments.



Sri Lankan Paint Factory Warehouse

During the workshop with the small paint manufacturers, Al Jazeera TV shot a news story on the country's success in implementing one of the first laws in Asia restricting the use of lead paints. The story is available online at: <http://youtu.be/ICmfBIhykOo>

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Exide Lead Battery Recycling Plant Suspended by California

Exide Technologies lead battery recycling plant outside of Los Angeles was shut down by State regulators in April due to pollution concerns from a leaking pipe. In a very unusual action, the State of California suspended operations at the facility. A California Superior Court then ruled in June that the plant could operate until a full hearing in the case scheduled for July 2nd.

On June 10th the company filed for bankruptcy protection citing the plant closure and other financial pressures. Earlier the South Coast Air Quality Management District said the plant posed an elevated cancer risk to as many as 110,000 people primarily from Arsenic emissions. At the same time, the Los Angeles city council asked the city attorney to investigate possible legal action against the company. Nevertheless, Exide is fighting the closure before an administrative judge.

These events highlight the hazardous nature of this industry and the risks to communities and even investors. Shares of the company which started out the year at \$3.42 are down around \$0.20/share.

China has 180 million electric bikes each with 11 kg lead batteries that need to be recycled annually. This accounts for 39% of Chinese lead demand!

Industry Criticizes Publication of Lead Paint Study

OK International and our partners at CREPD jointly published the results of our lead paint testing in Cameroon in the May issue of the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene (10: 243–249). The article indicated that two-thirds of the paints tested from retail stores in the country exceeded U.S. regulatory standards of 90 ppm. In addition, a marketing survey of the products available in stores showed that only a small percentage of paint cans indicate any ingredients and none included any warning language based on the lead content. You can find the results here: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15459624.2013.768934?journalCode=uoeh20#preview>.

The article included a call for the country to adopt mandatory standards to limit the lead content of paints. Such recommendations are consistent with the goals of the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint that was launched under the auspices of the United Nations.

Several publications ran stories summarizing our findings including the International Business Times, the Huffington Post, and the Yale 360 Magazine (see: http://e360.yale.edu/feature/long_outlawed_in_the_west_lead_paint_sold_in_poor_nations/2633/).

Following the publication, OK International received a letter from the International Paint and Printing Ink Council (IPPIC) denouncing our attempt to characterize the content of consumer paints. The letter criticized the report saying it “only identified lead paint that is on the shelf” in countries where it is legal. The association also claims that it “offers little useful information.” Similar charges were contained in a story published in the American Coatings Association publication, CoatingsTech Magazine (May 2013).

Lead Kills 674,000 People Every Year

Perry Gottesfeld of OK International published an editorial titled “Toxic Hypocrisy” in the June 2013 edition of the British publication New Scientist. The article points out that the EU and U.S. are exporting over 28,000 tons of lead pigments a year. Much of these exports are destined to developing countries without any regulations on lead content for paints or other consumer products. The full text of the editorial is available online at: http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21829190.200-the-wests-toxic-hypocrisy-over-lead-paint.html#_Ub-ncJWPSS0

The article also cites results from a Gates Foundation sponsored study published by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, showing that more than 674,000 deaths each year are attributed to lead exposure. ([http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(12\)61766-8/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(12)61766-8/abstract)) To put this in perspective, the study indicates that this is about four times the number of deaths attributed to drugs and about 20 times the number caused by occupational exposures to asbestos. Most of the deaths accounted for in this estimate are attributable to cardiovascular disease.

China Orders More Disclosure and Curbs on Air Pollution

On June 15th China’s cabinet announced 10 new measures to curb air pollution. For the first time, the government is requiring that heavily polluting industries disclose their environmental emissions. If executed, this measure could have an impact similar to that seen in the U.S., Canada and European countries after governments mandated companies to disclose their emissions on an annual basis. The action specifically mentions curbs on PM 2.5 in large urban areas that can have a significant impact on improving public health. It also sets emission reduction targets for heavy polluters.

China Announces Lead Battery Recycling Targets

The Chinese government announced targets to require that 90% of used lead batteries are recycled by 2015 with the goal of having 50% of the country's supply of lead come from recycled material. The document released by an interagency group of five departments also outlines the following policy goals:

- Increase the efficiency of lead battery recycling plants;
- Improve the project approval process and siting of new plants to implement protective distance requirements and other measures;
- Require compulsory cleaner production audits every two-years;
- Strengthen environmental law enforcement and regulations;
- Improve blood lead monitoring for workers;
- Crack down on illegal dismantling and indigenous refining;
- Improve the collection of used lead batteries;
- Increase transparency with disclosure of factory locations, capacity and emissions on an annual basis.

The Chinese government closed hundreds of lead battery manufacturing and recycling plants since 2011 for noncompliance with environmental regulations and to improve efficiency.

Nigeria Gold Mining Cleanup Begins Again

A long-delayed cleanup of lead contaminated homes and soil in the village of Bagega in Zamfara, Nigeria began in April and is nearly complete. The environmental cleanup was the last hurdle allowing Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) to start testing children and chelating those with the highest exposures. Medical treatment can only be safely administered when children have a home to return to that is sufficiently free of lead contamination.

Environmental remediation involves removing topsoil and mine tailings from homes, buildings and other common areas. All of the work is being conducted by local laborers under the supervision of a team of remediation specialist from TerraGraphics in the U.S.

Over the past three years MSF treated more than 2,500 children throughout the State of Zamfara that were exposed to lead present in the gold ore being mined in the area. At least 400 children have died in Zamfara due to lead poisoning during this outbreak.

Several villages had been remediated since 2010, but there were significant delays in getting Nigerian government support to complete the cleanup. The government is also proceeding with efforts to introduce safer mining practices in the area. OK International conducted an investigation last year for the Nigerian Ministry of Mines and Steel Development to identify other mining regions in the country with significant concentrations of lead in gold ores.

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