



The Lead Education and Abatement Design Group
Working to eliminate lead poisoning globally and to protect
the environment from lead in all its uses: past, current and new uses
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Scuttling ex-warship off Avoca Beach makes no sense and may not be legal

The planned sinking of the decommissioned frigate, ex-HMAS Adelaide off Avoca Beach by the NSW Government, should not go ahead on April 13, or at all, says Elizabeth O'Brien, President of the LEAD (Lead Education & Abatement Design) Group Inc.

“As far as my organisation is aware, there have not been adequate studies on the impact of lead on marine life or the fate of lead in the marine environment,” she said.

“Paint flakes falling off the ship over time could be washed ashore and become part of the beach sand becoming hazardous to people particularly young children who may eat beach sand. This also creates a hazard for wildlife, especially birds and bottom-feeding marine life.”

Ms O'Brien stated that “Australia is a signatory to the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter 1972, which codified the "precautionary principle". Being a party to the convention, means that a body wishing to dump certain wastes at sea requires a permit. And permits for wastes such as vessels and bulky items including iron, steel and similar materials are limited to those circumstances where such wastes are generated at locations with no land-disposal alternatives.

“If the NSW Government has a permit under this Convention, then I would have to wonder how they obtained it, considering that there are up to 2.3 tonnes of lead in the 23,000 square metres of lead paint on the ship and Garden Island in Sydney Harbour sits ready and able to recycle the ship safely. Would anyone else be able to obtain a permit to dump 2.3 tonnes of lead waste at sea? Non-toxic artificial reef materials are also available, so that no one need be disappointed if the ship is not scuttled.

“The NSW Government may well believe that lead leaching from the sunk ship over time would not exceed the Guidelines for recreational water quality, however, The LEAD Group is still awaiting a reply from the Federal government to our December 2010 request to review the current blood lead goal downwards. Such a recognition of the weight of evidence on negative health impacts at very low blood lead levels would consequently be followed by a review of other environmental guidelines for lead, such as the permissible lead content of recreational waters.”

“Given that there is claimed to still be a vast amount of paint, containing lead, remaining on the ship - after the removal of ex-foliating and peeling paint – scuttling the ship is a risk that should not be taken.

“There is also a real possibility that the remaining paint contains polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), as the ship was built in the United States, which was still using PCBs in marine paint up until it was banned for most uses in 1979. PCBs are carcinogenic and are stored in human and animal fatty tissue.” Ms O'Brien said it was ironic that removal of Adelaide's lead ballast, as required of ships being scuttled, makes the ship that bit safer for marine life, but has made it unsafe, in expert opinion, to make the trip up Sydney Harbour and out to sea.

“It could sink,” she said. “How much better – financially and environmentally - to dismantle the ship and recycle the paint for its lead content (at Australian Refined Alloys in Alexandria) as well as the scrap metal, etc.”

“I support the No Ship campaign in their efforts to stop the sinking.”

The Lead Education & Abatement Design Group Inc., is a non government organisation which aims to eliminate lead poisoning globally and to protect the environment from lead.

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