



## Max Mawby's Report on Union Action for Lead Safety in Australia

At The LEAD Group's AGM on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2025 – Max Mawby, Power Industry Organiser for CEPU SA (South Australia) representing Union members in the Electricity Supply and Contracting Industry sector, to report on Chris Green & Sean Gibbons who were lead-poisoned from working at the AGL Torrens Island Power station and the CEPU's response.

Max Mawby's report to the AGM was supported by a slide show including some news video. Dropbox link to slide show -

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/jez8ow7jwh4rg3berzvrs/ALtoTohzLLqeOmFu83sYRlE?rlkey=vo20vev5y1jtke6ct81pmg5vp&st=iwa8g6xq&dl=0>

- **AGL workers poisoned by Lead** - <https://youtu.be/3iyZkbudMD8?si=XeeyO9UA-BqdWvpY>
- **Criminal proceedings launched against AGL over 'unsafe' lead levels** | **ABC NEWS** [https://youtu.be/wx\\_rOynjSpo?si=oFLrHJpq921eXpKD](https://youtu.be/wx_rOynjSpo?si=oFLrHJpq921eXpKD)
- **Lead in Bunnings hardware stores** - <https://youtu.be/FbRHENrTB-A?si=oejRnbDLhmACfuwR>

Max Mawby: In Australia, employers only have to treat work as lead risk work if the blood lead (PbB) could exceed 20ug/dL or 5ug/dL for reproductive females. There's no standard OHS Pb fact sheet so employers of lead risk workers can provide any information they choose. We've proposed a better system. You have to hit 30 ug/dL or 10 ug/dL for females of reproductive capacity before being removed from lead risk work in Australia.

Tim Pye: The suspension level is currently 60 ug/dL in the UK but there's a plan to reduce that to 30 ug/dL in 2026 and 15 ug/dL in 2028 for most workers, but to 5 ug/dL by 2028 for women of childbearing capacity. There is also an action level with a proposal for that to be 10ug/dL for most workers and 2 ug/dL for women of childbearing capacity by 2028.

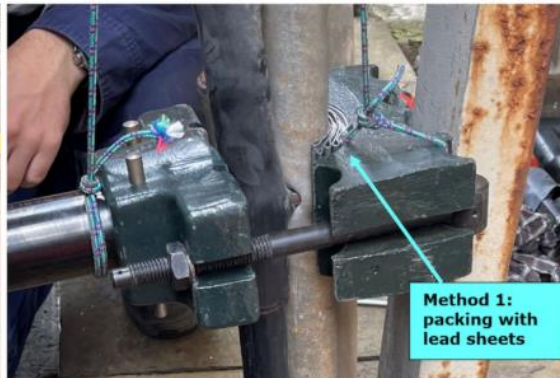
Ananda Card: In New Zealand, we have no blood lead level at which a worker must be removed from lead risk work. Lead workers get sick and can't work so they go on a disability pension for the rest of their lives.

Max Mawby (MM): SWA doc says do surface wipe sampling in place of air Pb but they provide no guidance on what the surface dust wipe lead level in the workplace should be before action is taken.

Elizabeth O'Brien (EO): since the revision of the Australian Standard on Lead Paint Management in 2017, there's been no dust wipe lead clearance level even for contractors managing lead paint in homes (they're supposed to consult an expert and agree to comply with what the expert says but that simply never happens and mostly dust wipes are not



collected even at the end of the paint management job) and the 1998 Lead Paint Management clearance level was astronomical so The LEAD Group Kit Interpretation Guide has for many years, used the US Lead Paint Dust Wipe Clearance level, but actually one tenth of the 12 ug/ft<sup>2</sup> level found to keep most children below 10ug/dL in US research in homes [by Dixon et al (2008) at <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/ehp.11918> ], because we aim to keep



**Bunnings Lead On Shelves**



all blood lead levels below 1 ug/dL; and for occupational dust wipe lead clearance, LEAD Group Kits have always used the US level - making Posted LEAD Group Kits extremely

helpful both in homes and workplaces - everyone here should be using them! I noticed that you did achieve packaging of lead sheet in Bunnings stores (as per slide 7, pictured) but that their packaging is very flimsy and often broken.

MM: Yes we have seen broken cellophane or paper packaging in many stores and noticed that when the packaging was introduced, it was simply placed on the incredibly dusty shelves that had previously held the unwrapped lead sheeting.

MM: On 1/9/24 the law changed and I went to collect surface dust wipes at a worksite where one of our Union members had been lead poisoned but I was noticed collecting the samples and I was stopped from taking the samples off-site. SWA have appointed Prof Karen Walker-Bone to lead the Monash Uni research on blood lead and bone lead testing for workers. [See <https://lens.monash.edu/@karen-walker-bone> ] We've put forward a Working with Lead Code of Practice which includes dust wipe clearance testing. We've only had one meeting but I'll propose something about a more stringent occupational dust wipe lead clearance level

EO: and hopefully one that takes in to account that some workplaces (like the workplaces of paint management contractors) return to being or become homes with young children or indoor pets or backyard chickens once the contractor has finished the job. Max, that was a fantastic presentation.