

THE LEAD GROUP

Media Release

4th May 1992

At a public meeting last night in Balmain, residents called for a government-run campaign to raise public awareness about the high risk of lead poisoning to urban children and for the government to seriously set about lowering lead levels from traffic fumes. The following facts were revealed by the speakers and during the discussion:-

- * Dr Garth Alperstein, Community Paediatrician with the Public Health Unit for Central and Southern Sydney Area Health Service warned renovators against sandblasting, dry sanding, or using blow torches or heat guns to remove leaded paint.
- * Martha Ansara, Organiser with the Evans Street Resident Action Group said these methods of paint stripping were used daily in the area and had been for years. She suggested that several organisations could be asked to purchase an \$8000 x-ray flouroscope which could be loaned out to residents for use in detecting lead in paints before renovations were begun.
- * Dr Michael Mira of the Public Health Unit said a soon to be published report had found that 25% of 12-48 month old children tested so far in the inner west were found to have a blood lead level above 15 ug/dL (0.724 umol/L). Children present during renovation of older houses are between 2 and 12 times more likely to have a blood lead level above 15 ug/dL. Extrapolating from these findings, Dr Mira predicted that there would be many thousands of children in Sydney with levels above 15 ug/dL but that it was up to the Health Department and not the Public Health Unit to form a policy to address this situation.
- * Elizabeth O'Brien, spokesperson for the community-based Lead Education and Abatement Design (LEAD) Group urged all parents whose children are at risk of lead poisoning to have their 12 - 48 month old children blood lead tested at a pathology clinic (after obtaining a GP's referral). She said that if parents waited for the government to have a strategy on lead poisoning their children may be too old to benefit from it. It is vital that children have as little lead as possible in their systems for the first three years when brain development is so rapid. Knowing your child's blood lead level provides the necessary amount of motivation to lower the level with the aim being to reduce it to below 10 ug/dL (0.48 umol/L) to minimise adverse neurobehavioural effects.

Also, all car owners should check with the NRMA as to whether their car can run on unleaded petrol. 30% of pre-1986 cars can do so at no extra cost.

The L.E.A.D. Group, which was set up by concerned parents in the inner west of Sydney, stresses that although these steps are effective as a cure, prevention of lead contamination is a much more effective way to fight the lead problem.

"Keeping the home clean, washing toys, clothes, floors, hands, hair and furniture has been shown to reduce lead risks. However, these steps are putting the main burden of lead reduction onto each individual rather than on government bodies who should be taking responsibility," says Elizabeth O'Brien, Chairperson of the Lead Group.

"It is also vital for those people who have, or plan to have children, to form a common voice in calling for the reduction of lead in petrol and government-instigated education programs which will convince drivers who can convert from leaded petrol to do so, and to teach renovators and professional painters how to remove paint safely.

"The L.E.A.D. Group has proposed to the NSW Premier that it work with the government as the community representative in the formulation of a lead strategy to combat urban lead problems," says Elizabeth O'Brien.

For further information about the L.E.A.D. Group please call (02) 550 0095.