

LEAD POISONING

SEVERE THREAT TO OUR CHILDREN

An Op-Ed by U.S.

Rep. Cardiss Collins (D-IL)

If you had the opportunity to prevent lead poisoning, which is most commonly found in low-income urban Black, White, and Hispanic children, would you take advantage of it?

That's a question facing Congress currently as a result of a bill I introduced at the end of last year, H.R. 3956, the Oil Recycling and Safe Handling Act (ORSHA).

This legislation propose a system for stopping the single largest source of industrial air-borne lead pollution in the country: the unregulated burning of used oil in boilers to heat and fuel schools, hospitals, apartments and industries.

Burning dirty used is as dangerous as dumping it in the trash or sewers, and perhaps even more so. Used oil typically is contaminated with deadly amounts of lead, chromium, arsenic, cadmium, and other toxins, often in higher concentrations than those found in hazardous wastes. These contaminants are not destroyed by simple burning. If they are not removed from used oil before it is burned, these toxic elements become air pollution. Eventually they fall back to earth and poison the land and water as well.

Pollution from the burning of used oil is a particular concern because of the threat it poses to children. Lead is known to cause brain damage and other neurological disorders, especially in young children.

In fact, Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Louis Sullivan has declared lead "the number one environmental health threat to children." Currently, almost 800 million gal-

lons of poisonous used oil are burned every year, generating almost 600,000 pounds of lead.

There currently is no national plan for safely managing used oil to decontaminate it before it is burned. In contrast to the government's ongoing attention to lead in paint, water and gasoline, it has virtually ignored the lead threat posed by the hazardous handling of used oil. But given the overwhelming evidence that the unregulated burning of used oil is poisoning our health and environment with lead, Congress should be eager to take advantage of the opportunity before it to create a national used oil management system that works.

There is no excuse for allowing any form of lead poisoning to continue, particularly when the source is used oil, a valuable resource that can be safely recycled without posing a threat to human health or the environment.

The technology exists today to cost-effectively refine used oil, which cleans and prepares it to be used as a lubricant. Technology also exists to simply decontaminate used oil so that it can be used as a fuel without severe repercussions. In states that use such technology, used oil is safely recycled.

The best example of a successful used oil recycling system is in California, where more used oil is collected and safely recycled per capita than in any other state.

The California system works because it encourages consumers to take their used oil to collection sites, and gives everyone confidence that the oil will be decontaminated before it is used again.

Experts believe that the California system should be used as a model for a federal program

system for the safe management of used oil. ORSHA would establish strict guidelines for the

it is used again as a fuel or lube stock.

This plan also would make used oil recycling more convenient for do-it-yourselfers by creating incentives for non-profit organizations and businesses, including stores, quick-lube shops and service stations to collect used oil for recycling.

Reducing lead emissions that pollute the environment is a well-accepted and widely endorsed priority of our environmental statutes and regulations.

For the sake of our children and our environment, I urge our people to demand action from their representatives in Congress in support of this initiative.

HEALTH

that would encourage used oil recycling. H.R. 3956 would established such a nationwide

safe handling and disposal of used oil, ensuring that lead and other toxins are removed before



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