

*Hazardous Substances*

peelings or chips involve a type of white lead paint that has not been made in North America for over 40 years. Modern white paints contain titanium dioxide rather than white lead as the pigment. Such paints present little hazard. Until a few years ago small quantities of coloured lead pigments were frequently used in yellow, orange, blue and green paint. Voluntary action on the part of paint manufacturers led to the use of alternative, non-lead pigments. Today only very small amounts of lead-containing compounds are occasionally used as drying and binding agents in consumer paints.

The Hazardous Products Act regulates the sale of interior architectural paints containing more than 0.5 per cent lead in the dried film. The Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs routinely analyses interior paints to ensure compliance. In recent years most consumer paints have been found to contain lead at levels considerably below the 0.5 per cent limit.

Exposure to lead is experienced primarily via naturally occurring levels in food and inhaled particles. There is little evidence that consumer paints contribute significantly to human exposure to lead in Canada, even in children. A number of recent studies have been conducted on blood-lead levels in children both in Canada and in the United States. In general, urban children living in high-density areas tend to have higher blood-lead levels than children in less dense areas. This has been attributed to greater exposure to lead arising from automobile emissions. Clusters of high blood-lead levels and even overt clinical symptoms may be seen in communities where deliberate inhalation abuse of gasoline is prevalent.

Scientists within the Department of National Health and Welfare have carefully examined recent research results on the effects of low levels of lead in the body. They have concluded that there is a need to reduce the existing intervention level of 40 micrograms per decilitre of blood to 20 to 25 micrograms per decilitre of blood.

This conclusion was based upon new and old scientific evidence of effects in the most sensitive portion of our population, that being children. An intervention level is used to trigger an active program to identify the sources of an individual's exposure to lead and a strategy to reduce the body's lead levels before health may be affected. In addition, the World Health Organization has proposed, and the Department has supported, a revised maximum allowable weekly intake for lead in children of 25 micrograms per kilogram of body weight.

The need to reduce intervention levels should not be confused with a need to reduce lead levels in paint. Most consumer paints presently available in Canada have lead contents below that prescribed by legislation, and lead intake via ingested paint is considered by officials in the Department to represent a minor route of exposure in Canadian children.

Nevertheless, I should impress upon the House the need for us to be prudent and to reduce potential Canadian exposure to toxic substances, when feasible, to levels considered to pose no significant risk. I can tell the House that officials of the

Department of National Health and Welfare are currently discussing the feasibility of the mandatory elimination of all lead-containing additives in paint products to which children are exposed.

Scientists within the Department will continue to monitor this situation to ensure that Canadians are well protected from exposure to lead and other toxic chemicals in consumer products, food, and the environment.

**Mr. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak on Motion M-54 put forward by the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia). At the outset I would like to say how pleased and interested I was to hear the comments of the Member for Essex—Kent (Mr. Caldwell). As you know, that Member has a reputation for being sensitive to environmental issues as well as a whole range of other issues. It is a credit to the people of his riding that they had the foresight to send him to Parliament. He has been a tremendous addition to this place, and I and other Members have been very pleased to have been associated with him these past three years.

The motion which we are debating today states:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of reducing the allowable lead content in all consumer paints, particularly those used on products for children, from the existing level of 0.5 % to 0.06 per cent.

The proposal makes a certain amount of sense in the same way as a motion supporting motherhood would make a lot of sense. Lead is a well-known environmental poison and is highly toxic to humans. That is undebatable. Once released into the environment it does not move through natural pathways to more remote locations. Compared to other heavy metals it has a very long environmental persistence and, therefore, is a product which we should be very concerned about and aware of. If there is widespread exposure to lead now, future generations will also be exposed to the lead which is already in the environment or is being added to it every day.

There is no doubt that releases of lead into the environment and human exposure to it constitute, therefore, major environmental and health problems. Having said that, I must, nevertheless, point out that the motion of the Hon. Member for Davenport is redundant. The motion asks the Government to consider the advisability of reducing the allowable lead content. I maintain that the Government, through its highly trained and extremely competent specialists in the Departments of National Health and Welfare, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, and the Environment have already considered the advisability of such a reduction and found that it is not warranted.

Canada has already carefully considered the negative health effects of lead and has implemented a variety of effective measures which strictly control the use of lead, curtail the release of lead into the environment, and keep the exposure of Canadian citizens to lead well within safe limits.