

Hazardous Substances

the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) regarding the permissible lead content for consumer paints.

The Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, among other Departments, has been concerned for many years about the risk posed to Canadians by lead. The Department is aware that humans are exposed to lead from many sources. For example, trace levels of lead are found in the air, in water, and food. The Department is also aware that children are more susceptible than adults to the toxic effects of this metal.

In the past, when the need for action was demonstrated, the Department took several measures under the Hazardous Products Act to limit the exposure of Canadians, particularly children, to this insidious toxic metal. These initiatives were taken either in response to a specific need, as with the 1971 regulations governing the release of lead from glazed ceramic dinnerware, or as part of the over-all federal government policy to reduce the use of lead in the environment.

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One of the first initiatives under the Hazardous Products Act was the establishment of a limit for the quantity of lead in liquid coating materials such as paint used on children's furniture. The limit which came into effect on May 1, 1970, is 0.5 per cent by weight.

Following this, on November 4, 1970, children's toys and playthings, painted or decorated with a coating that contained lead in excess of 0.5 per cent, were banned. On August 21, 1973, similarly coated pencils and artists' brushes were banned. Effective January 1, 1976, paints sold to consumers for home use could not contain more than 0.5 per cent lead. These requirements remain in force today.

The Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has demonstrated unflinching concern for the safety of Canadians. On numerous occasions, actions under the Hazardous Products Act have been taken to remove hazardous products from the market-place and to protect Canadians. In addition, the Department devotes considerable effort to ensuring that existing regulations continue to provide adequate protection for Canadians. Recent examples are the revisions to the regulations for cribs and children's sleepwear.

The motion of the Hon. Member is that 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 per cent to 0.06 per cent. Prior to 1950, lead pigments and other lead compounds were used extensively in paints, but new technology and materials have virtually eliminated lead from household paints. Lead pigments are no longer used and, although small quantities of lead dryers are apparently necessary for some formulations, they too are being replaced.

In 1974, as the Hon. Member was saying, the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission concluded that a level of 0.5 per cent lead in paint was safe. In 1976, the U.S. Congress

directed that the commission determine if a lead level in excess of 0.06 per cent but less than 0.5 per cent was safe. Although there was a little new information, powerful consumer advocacy groups supported by Senator Edward Kennedy intervened in the hearings held by the commission in support of the 0.06 per cent limit.

Subsequently, the commission decided that the available scientific information was insufficient to determine if the lead levels between 0.5 per cent and 0.06 per cent were either safe or unsafe. Therefore, the legislative process in the United States dictated that the new lower limit of 0.06 per cent be established.

Canada has not experienced the outbreaks of severe lead poisoning from paint ingestion observed in the United States. I think it is important to note that in most instances, lead poisoning in the United States occurred with children who suffered from an affliction called "pica", an abnormal tendency to compulsively chew on things, and who also had access to old paint heavily laced with lead. As I stated earlier, such paints were manufactured long ago, decades before the Hazardous Products Act was proclaimed.

In recent years, information obtained from a sampling of hospitals across Canada indicated that there are no confirmed reports of lead poisoning from paints. The experience of other information sources such as medical associations, consumer complaints and representations from consumer advocacy groups is similar. Consequently, there is no reason to believe that Canadians are not adequately protected by the regulations for paints under the Hazardous Products Act.

In addition, it is my understanding that the scientists at Health and Welfare Canada maintain that the 0.5 per cent limit for lead is adequate. Officials in the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs will continue to monitor this situation to ensure that Canadians are well protected from lead in consumer products subject to the Hazardous Products Act.

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview—Greenwood): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) for bringing in an excellent resolution today which will be one important measure toward improving the health of Canadian children. Of course, we need many more measures to attack the problem of lead poisoning.

Of course, we are becoming more and more aware that even very small quantities of lead in the air, in the soil, in paint, in water and from other sources will have a developmental effect on children. There are effects on their ability to grow, on their mental development and on their hearing. Of course, in larger quantities, lead can cause blindness and even death. These are the acute effects of lead poisoning.

The evidence we are beginning to get now as to what amounts of lead are commonly found in the blood of children is shocking. These levels are very dangerous indeed. I take a