Northeast Remediation News

THE LEAD POISONING OF OUR CHILDREN

America's Dirty Little Secret

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Until recently, it was generally assumed that lead poisoning of our children was no longer a cause for concern. Since the U.S. removed lead from gasoline in 1976 and banned it from paint in 1978, most health professionals, regulators and the general public had considered the problem to be largely solved. Since peaking in the late 1970's, the average concentration of lead in the American bloodstream has declined by a factor of ten. [18] Moreover, the number of cases of acute lead poisoning requiring hospitalization has been declining steadily since the 1970's. At that time it was not uncommon for pediatricians to see lead poisoning cases in which children had blood lead levels (BLL) greater than or equal to 45 µg/dL (micrograms per deciliter), at which point children often exhibit both neurological problems and anemia. At higher blood lead levels (BLL of 70 to 100 µg/dL) children can suffer from comas and seizures or even die. [13]

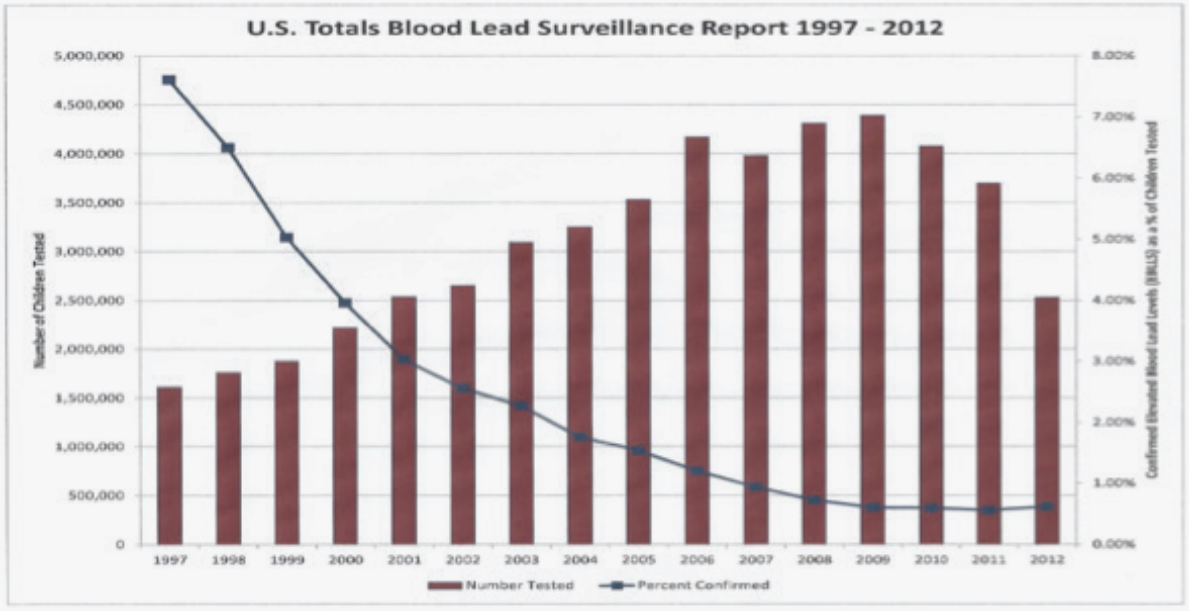
Today childhood deaths from lead poisoning are extremely rare and most pediatric lead poisoning occurs in the children with BLL in the range of 10-20 µg/dL [13] (although in our remediation work we have seen numerous cases of children with BLL readings in excess of 30 µg/dL). This favorable trend can be seen in data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which tracks the percentage of children in America under the age of six testing positive for elevated blood lead levels (BLL > 10 µg/dL). As the CDC graph below illustrates, the number of children with a BLL reading equal to or greater than 10 µg/dL has fallen from 7.5% in 1997 to just under 1.0% in 2012.

Lead Poisoning versus Lead Exposure (Subclinical Toxicity)

While this data suggests that there is cause for celebration, it seems that these studies have not kept up with the changing science. While "lead poisoning", which is caused by acute exposure at high concentrations has been declining throughout the industrialized world, "lead exposure" (currently defined as BLL > 5 µg/dL) has become a chronic condition with severe long term effects. [8] In fact a new term, "subclinical toxicity" has been coined to denote the concept that relatively low-dose exposure to lead at blood levels previously thought to be safe can cause harmful effects despite an absence of obvious symptoms.

The developing human brain undergoes rapid growth and development from prenatal life into early childhood. Lead disrupts these extraordinarily complex and delicate processes. As a result, brain damage caused by chronic low level exposure to lead are irreversible [10] and untreatable.[21] As far back as the 1970's, epidemiological studies by Herbert Needleman and coworkers from Harvard Medical School demonstrated that children with blood lead levels in the moderate range are likely to have lower IQ scores and shortened attention spans than children with baseline blood levels. [13]

As a result of this new evidence, in 2012, the CDC's new definition of "elevated" blood lead levels for children under six has been revised down from > 10 µg/dL to > 5 µg/dL. What has become clear is that even when there are no outward symptoms, the long term effects of seemingly low levels of exposure (BLL of 5-9 µg/dL) are significantly more insidious and harmful to a child's long



term development than we previously realized. Moreover, unlike other heavy metals, such as mercury, there is no lower limit where lead is not toxic.[5][25] [26][27] This has lead Dr. Mary Jean Brown of the CDC to proclaim, "it is time to put to rest the myth that the lead problem is solved. There is no safe level of lead for children under six". [12]

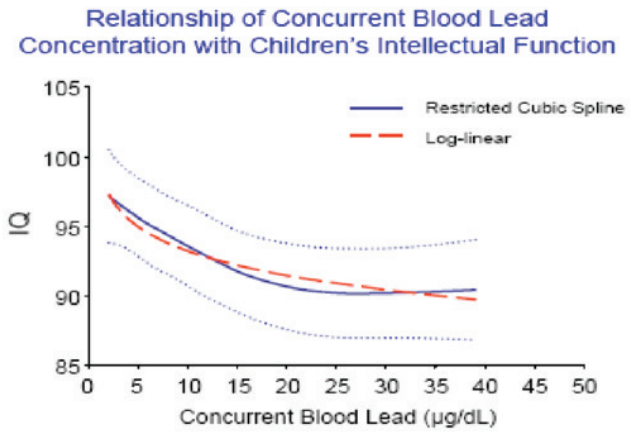
Based on the CDC's new standards there are over 270,000 children in the US with harmful levels of lead in their blood. In Massachusetts alone it is estimated by the CDC that 19,682 children under the age of six have HARMFUL levels of lead in their blood streams – more than enough to fill the Boston TD Garden to capacity. [11] Moreover, these estimates are likely to be low as the children most at risk for lead paint exposure are the least likely to be tested. Studies have shown that lead paint disproportionately impacts low income and minority children, with African American children and to a lesser extent, Latino children, recording much higher average BLLs than white children. [15] [14]

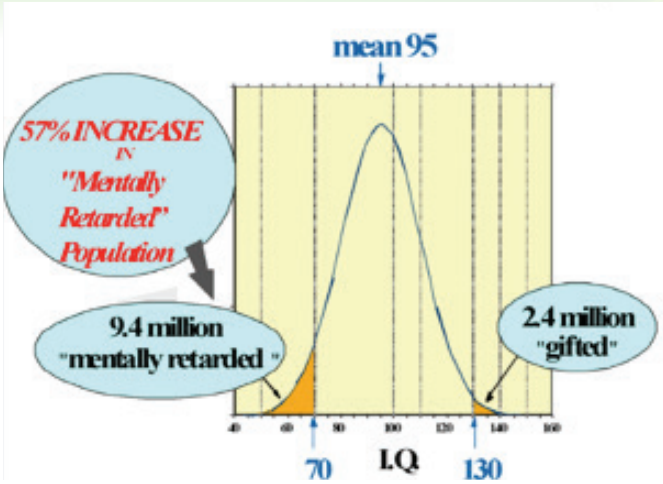
Low Level Lead Exposure Can Result in Significant Intellectual and Behavioral Problems

Lead exposure in young children has been linked to a number of intellectual and behavioral problems and developmental disabilities including decreased overall intelligence as well as a reduced performance in specific skills such as nonverbal reasoning, reading, math and fine motor skills. Low level childhood exposure to lead has also been linked with memory loss, inability to focus, difficulty controlling emotional responses and poor social skills. [2][3] In short, early childhood exposure to lead leads to symptoms that look a lot like marginal IQ, ADD and ADHD. Moreover, these effects are being found in children with very low levels of lead exposure.[4][22][23][24] Not surprisingly, in 21.1% of cases of diagnosed ADHD, the symptoms can be traced directly to elevated BLLs of > 2 µg/dL.[29]

Multiple studies in several countries have concluded that for children who have BLLs in the range of 10-20 µg/dL will lose approximately one-quarter to one-half of an IQ point for each one microgram increase in the blood level during the preschool years. [6] This has been corroborated by a UCLA Study that found a decrease in IQ score of 4.6 points for EACH 10 µg/dL increase in BLL. [13] That means a child with a BLL of 30 µg/dL has likely seen a decline of almost 14 IQ points.

What is even more disturbing is this effect is proportionally worse at lower levels of exposure. An international pooled analysis of data found that an increase in blood lead levels from less than 1 µg/dL to 10 µg/dL was associated with a loss of 6.0 IQ points, which is greater than the 4.6 IQ point decline that occurs when blood lead levels increase from 10 µg/dL to 20 µg/dL. [7] What makes this all the more concerning is the enormous number of children that are thought to have "some" elevated level of lead in their bloodstream. Of the 27.97 million children aged six and under in the U.S. in 2006 (U.S. Census Bureau 2008), 24.7% of 6.9 million children, had BLLs between 2 µg/dL and 10 µg/dL. [14] [25] The direct inverse relationship between BLL and IQ has been confirmed by numerous investigators. [8] The results are illustrated in the graph below.





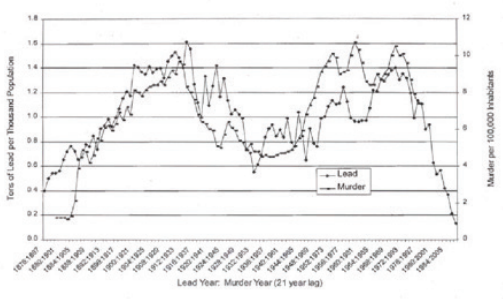
In the attached graph, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that childhood exposure to lead is responsible for a 57% increase in the "mentally retarded population" in America.

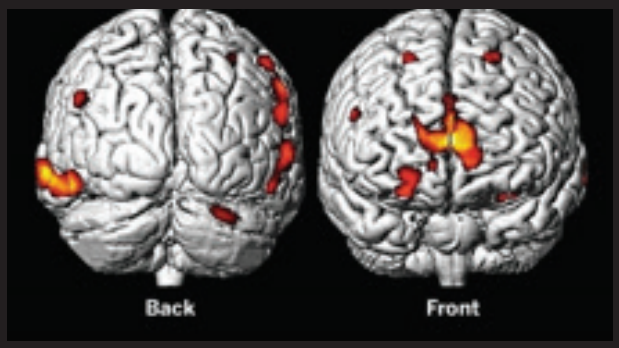
Source: Lanpher et al. (2005)

Consequently, elevated BLL have been found to be one of the leading causes of mental retardation in America (see graph above). Elevated BLL also results in a substantial increase in the number of children who do poorly in school as well as the number of children that require special education and other remedial programs. As a result, elevated BLLs are associated with an increased risk of not completing high school.[31] In fact, it was found that 20% of children with BLLs in excess of 25 µg/dL needed special education.[30]

The long term effects are even greater as these children tend to end up as adults that are not able to fully contribute to society.[9] The problem is so great that in a recent lawsuit in California in which various California municipalities won a $1.15 Billion judgment against three paint companies for selling lead paint prior to 1978, the State's primary argument for compensation was that as a result of exposure to lead paint, the children of California had lost a total of 23 million IQ points.

Just in case the news was not bad enough, lead is increasingly being cited as a cause of dementia in the elderly. [19] [20] As we age, our bones demineralize releasing calcium (which is why bones in the elderly become increasingly brittle) and lead! Lead accumulates in our bones over a lifetime of exposure and then is released over a relatively short period of time late in life. What is becoming increasingly clear is that lead exposure is now thought to be





The orange shaded areas indicate loss of gray matter. These losses are focused in the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex, areas known for impulse control, emotional regulation and decision making

responsible for a wide range of mental health issues affecting all segments of the population, from ADD and ADHD in children to dementia in the elderly.

Exposure to Lead is Highly Correlated with Increased Rates of Criminal Activity

Medical and Economic research has established a connection between early childhood lead exposure and future criminal activity, especially of a violent nature. [13][22] Specifically, children with blood lead levels of 5–9 µg/dL have been shown to suffer disproportionately from behavioral problems, hyperactivity, trouble concentrating, difficulty with impulse control and higher rates of juvenile delinquency. These same children go on to experience difficulties throughout their lives, including higher rates of arrest [31] and higher levels of unemployment.

Dr. Kim Dietrich of University of Cincinnati College of Medicine conducted several studies of children with elevated BLLs and followed them into their thirties. Disturbingly, the studies found that the 250 children they followed with elevated lead levels were arrested 800 times over the 30 year period of the study. Moreover there was an undeniable correlation between their blood lead levels during childhood and their arrest rates as adults. [17]

In 2000, economist Rick Nevin published a study that found a staggering 90% correlation between elevated exposure to lead as a child and violent crime in America between 1941 and 1986 as is evidenced in the graph above showing the close correlation between the exposure to lead and the murder rate. In a separate study, using multiple regression analysis, 70% of the variation in murder rates between 1900 and 1960 could be attributed to exposure to lead paint. In 2007, Jessica Reyes, an economist at Amherst College, published a follow up study that found the same correlation states, cites and even neighborhoods. Nevin went on to prove that the correlation existed not only in the US as a whole but also in other countries [New Zealand, West Germany, UK and Italy] where there had not been an overall drop in crime. [17]

While correlation is not causation, the correlation is so consistently high that it is impossible to ignore and clearly suggests that there is at least some causal effect between early childhood exposure to lead and criminal activity as an adult. Moreover, there appears to be a medical basis for this. Working with Deithrich, Kim M. Cecil, an imaging expert at Cincinnati's Children's Hospital Medical Center found that as childhood blood lead levels increase, gray matter volume decreases in critical areas of the brain as seen in the scans below.[17] Coupled with diminished IQ, these effects of lead make it that much more difficult for adults that were exposed to lead as children to be able to function in society.

The Cost to Society of Childhood Exposure to Lead Paint is Staggering

Based on all of these findings, Jessica Reyes of Amherst College, has calculated that the economic fallout from chronic lead paint exposure in the United States alone is $209 billion a year. [33] Similarly, Elise Gould, of the Economic Policy Institute, took a detailed look at the lead related costs to society of increased health care requirements, reduced lifetime earnings, reduced tax revenues, special education costs, costs associated with lead induced ADD, ADHD and dementia and the direct cost of lead related crime and came up with an estimated cost to society of $181 billion to $267 billion annually. [14] In both cases, the numbers are so large they are difficult to contextualize.

Despite an avalanche of evidence suggesting that the long terms effects of even small amounts of lead are devastating to our children and to society as a whole, we have done little to remove the primary cause of lead poisoning – lead paint in our homes. Why? Because the cost of dealing with this problem is so significant and there are such powerful interests that oppose any program requiring wholesale remediation of America's housing stock.

According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development there are 38 million homes in the United States built before 1978 that have not been remediated [14] (1.5 million homes in Massachusetts alone). At a cost of $10,000 per home, this brings the national price tag to $380 billion ($15 billion for Massachusetts alone).

This problem can no longer be ignored. Nationally, children living in pre-1978 homes are 13 times more likely to have dangerous levels of lead in their blood than other children.[14] Moreover, this is not a problem that will go away by itself over time. While lead paint deteriorates over time, the lead in the paint does not. This creates even greater risk because as the lead paint starts to crumble and decay, it exposes the dangerous lead particles and lead dust. It only takes a small amount of lead to poison a child. A chip of paint the size of the period at the end of this sentence is sufficient to cause a BLL of 20 µg/dL if ingested by a young child. [15] A single gram of lead, which can easily fit in a sugar packet, is enough to create a lead dust hazard twice the recommended level in an entire block of 20 homes.[16] As a result, even the smallest amount of dust created by lead paint on high friction surfaces such as windows and doors is more than enough to cause serious and irreversible damage to a young child.

What Can Be Done About this Pressing Problem?

Today, the only people forced to remediate a property with lead paint are landlords and then only if they rent to a family with a child under six (and then only if the tenant complains). Given the shortage of affordable rental properties, few tenants complain. In fairness, tenants don't complain and homeowners don't take action in large part because they don't fully comprehend the risks. If parents of young children across America were better informed of the risk that lead paint poses to their children, it is likely that nearly all would get their home tested for lead and remediate if necessary. In a society where parents struggle to give their children every possible advantage, spending thousands of dollars on lessons, tutors, travel teams and overnight camps, no parent will knowingly subject their children to airborne toxins that can dramatically reduce their IQ and cause irreversible behavioral problems.

Arguably there are four ways society can deal with this problem. The first, as suggested above, is education. People must be made aware of the risks. This approach has worked for cigarettes and seat belts which suggest that it could also be an effective tool for making people aware of the dangers associated with early childhood exposure to lead paint. This is something that the State and Federal governments must undertake to do. Despite numerous scholarly articles about the problem, the general public is blissfully unaware. Only through a coordinated and well-orchestrated marketing campaign can we effectively get the word out.

The second approach is the one taken by the State of California – go after lead paint manufacturers in order to create a fund to remediate contaminated homes. California recently made news when it won a judgment of $1.15 billion from three lead paint manufacturers. These funds will be used to help homeowners defray the cost of remediating their homes. While $1.15 billion is nowhere near enough to cover the abatement costs for every home with lead in California, it can deal with the most dangerous cases (i.e. those homes that currently have young children living in them).

The third approach is forced remediation by government mandate. In Massachusetts, when a home is sold a "Title V" inspection of the septic system must be performed and if the system fails, either the buyer or seller is responsible for repairing the system so that it can pass inspection. Repairing a septic system can be a big ticket item, not dissimilar to the cost of lead paint remediation. The rationale behind requiring a Title V inspection on the sale of a home is that in this way the homeowner is not required to come out of pocket to repair the system until they sell the house and can build the cost of compliance into the selling price of the home. By requiring homeowners to get a deleading certificate when they sell the home, society can be assured that the problem will be ultimately resolved over time without placing an undue burden on homeowners or on society as a whole by requiring the entire housing stock to be deleaded at one time.

The last approach (which is already starting to pick up some momentum on its own) is for banks to require homes to be lead free before providing a mortgage. Since 90% of all mortgages are still somehow tied to the US Government (either through Fannie, Freddie, FHA, VA, etc…) implementation of this policy at a federal level would in essence solve the problem.

Even without Government leadership on this issue (which is unlikely to happen in any reasonable time frame), individual banks are starting to institute this requirement on their own as there have been recent cases in which banks have taken on the liability for children that have been poisoned in homes that the banks acquired through foreclosure.

Irrespective of the approach (or combination of approaches) we take, it is clear that the cost of remediation, whatever it may be, pales in comparison with the cost of doing nothing. Lead poisoning is like the tip of an iceberg. The part that is visible seems small and of little concern.

Like an iceberg, however, it is the part we cannot see, the long term effects of chronic lead exposure, lurking just beneath the surface, that poses the greatest danger to our children. As with an iceberg, once there is contact, it is too late to change course- the harm is irreparable. That is why the only answer is prevention - through both awareness and remediation. It is time we faced up to the problem and took action for the sake of our children.

About Northeast Remediation

When the owners of Northeast Remediation decided to de-lead all of their rental properties, they tried to find lead paint remediation firms to handle the work. Unfortunately, they quickly discovered that there was a severe shortage of capable, dependable and trustworthy companies to do the work. Instead they found a ragtag collection of small remediation firms that were unreliable and often did shoddy work, damaging moldings and destroying irreplaceable woodwork. Worse, many of the firms cut corners and took short-cuts when it came to compliance. It quickly became clear, if we wanted to remediate the hundreds of rental units owned and managed by the owners of Northeast Remediation, we had to form our own lead paint remediation company. This is how Northeast Remediation was born.

Since its formation, Northeast Remediation has brought a level of professionalism to the de-leading industry that was desperately needed. All of Northeast Remediation's crew chiefs have at least 15 years of de-leading experience. Our staff is comprised of highly trained, uniformed and bonded employees that all have the highest lead paint removal certification available. As the fasted growing lead paint remediation company in the

Northeast Remediation

At Northeast Remediation, our mission is to play a leading role in the de-leading of every home in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, for far too long, society has ignored the risks that homes contaminated with lead pose to our children. In large part this is due to a lack of awareness. Most people simply do not understand the seriousness of the lead paint exposure and the risk it poses to our children. As a result, far too few homes are remediated each year as landlords and even parents turn a blind eye to the problem.

Financing Available for your Lead Remediation Project

One of the most unique qualities that differentiate Northeast Remediation from the existing field of lead abatement companies is our ability to assist prospective clients with obtaining financing for their lead remediation project. In today's economic environment, qualified and deserving homeowners should be able to finance their project with ease. At NER, we can assist you in selecting the appropriate financial product for you and your family.

If your credit score is above 580, we have a product to suit your needs. Most of our programs do not require that you have any equity in your property and the majority of the products offered are unsecured and based on your debt-to-income ratio and existing credit score. No matter how small or large the engagement, NER can walk you through each phase of this endeavor and ensure that the financial aspect of deleading is a sound decision.

Our application process is a quick, simple, paperless and secure. Many of our prospective clients receive an answer on their financing in as little as five (5) minutes.

Visit us at: ***www.neremediationllc.com/financing***

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About the Author

Bryan Scott Ganz is the founder and CEO of Scudder Bay Capital LLC, an owner of residential rental properties. The company was formed in 2009 by Mr. Ganz and his late wife, Susan Jane Ganz, to help deserving and cooperative families that were at risk of losing their homes to the foreclosure crisis. Scudder Bay purchased these non-performing notes and then worked with homeowners to either help them stay in their homes though loan modifications (when feasible) or to provide financial assistance and relocation services to help these families transition to more affordable housing. In the process, Scudder Bay took title to hundreds of single family and multi-family homes which it proceeded to rent out – often to the same family that was living in the home.

As a landlord and property manager, Scudder Bay was then confronted with need to de-lead many of the homes it acquired through foreclosure purchase. What the company discovered in trying to do this was that the residential de-leading industry in Massachusetts was a fragmented hodgepodge of smaller companies that were unable to handle Scudder Bay's requirements in terms of either the volume of work or the quality of work. In order to meet Scudder Bay's own needs and assure compliance with the applicable lead paint remediation laws, Mr. Ganz started his own de-leading business – Northeast Remediation LLC. Today, Northeast Remediation (NER) is one of the largest and fastest growing residential lead paint remediation companies in New England doing work for both Scudder Bay and interested third parties.

Like many landlords, when Mr. Ganz was first made aware of the lead paint abatement requirements he thought that they were simply a bureaucratic carry over from an earlier time when lead paint was still a problem. It was that belief that prompted Mr. Ganz to do the research that is presented in this article. What Mr. Ganz discovered in researching the problem is that rather than the lead paint laws simply being a bureaucratic nuisance, the laws do not go far enough to deal with what is a very serious problem and continuing threat to our children.

Scudder Bay is committed and is well on its way to de-leading the hundreds of rental units it owns (whether or not there is currently a child under six living in the property). At the same time Mr. Ganz is on a campaign to educate parents, landlords, lenders, legislators and the general public about the latent dangers of lead paint exposure.

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