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E.P.A. Toughens Standard on Lead Emissions; Change Is the First in 3 Decades

By FELICITY BARRINGER
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The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) on Thursday set stringent new standards for airborne lead particles, following the recommendations of its science advisers and cutting the maximum allowable concentrations to a tenth of the previous standard. It was the first change in federal lead standards in three decades.

But the cleanup of areas with excessive lead levels is not required for more than eight years, and the system of monitors that detect the toxic contaminant is frayed. Currently, 133 monitors are in operation nationwide, down from about 800 in 1980, an E.P.A. spokeswoman, Cathy Milbourn, said. The agency is working on rebuilding this network, to include more than 300 monitors, Ms. Milbourn said.

The new standards set the limits for exposure at 0.15 micrograms per cubic meter of air, down from 1.5 micrograms, and well within the outer limit of 0.2 micrograms recommended by the advisers.

The agency's administrator, [Stephen L. Johnson](#), said in a statement, "With these stronger standards, a new generation of Americans are being protected from harmful lead emissions."

Mr. Johnson's usual critics in environmental groups offered uncharacteristic words of praise. "This is a great step in the right direction," said Gina Solomon, a scientist with the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#).

But Robert N. Steinwurtzel, a lawyer for the Association of Battery Recyclers, a group of six companies that use a smelting process to disassemble and recycle as many as 115 million car batteries annually, called the new standard problematic. "It potentially threatens the viability of the lead recycling industry," Mr. Steinwurtzel said.

Association officials traveled to the White House earlier this month to plead their case for a less stringent standard. Battery recyclers, along with utilities, cement kilns and metalworking shops, are the major emitters of airborne lead.

Lead's toxicity has been recognized for more than a century; the metal is associated with the impairment of neural development in infants and young children, and with cardiovascular disease and premature death in older people.

For more than 30 years, federal, state and local governments have tried to reduce exposure, by controlling industrial emissions, removing lead from gasoline and mounting

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campaigns to remove lead-based paint from homes. Some of the highest lead levels in blood can be found in children in older cities like Philadelphia, Providence, R.I., and Cleveland.

Bruce P. Lanphear, a professor in the health sciences department at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia who is an expert on lead toxicity, welcomed the agency's decision to follow the recommendations of its science advisers.

The new standard, Professor Lanphear said, "will make a difference, but won't lead to dramatic reductions" in blood-lead levels of younger children, which are now 80 percent to 95 percent lower than they were in the 1970s. Improvements in blood-lead levels had "begun to plateau" in recent years, he added, and the new standard could result in renewed progress.

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