UN environment programme

LEAD in PAINT

Assessment Report on Issues of Concern

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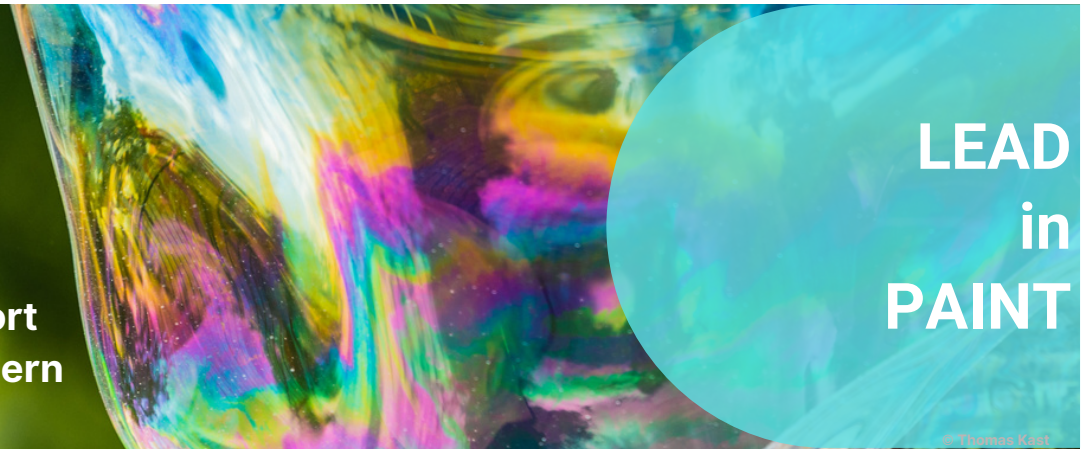

1. Introduction

Lead is a metal and a multi-system toxicant for which no safe level of exposure has been identified.

One major source of exposure, particularly for children, is through lead paint, or paint to which lead compounds have been added as pigments, drying agents or anti-corrosives.

2. Why is it relevant?

Exposure to lead can cause chronic and debilitating health impacts in all age groups, and children are particularly vulnerable to its neurotoxic effects The widespread use of lead has caused extensive environmental and human exposure across the globe.

Lead can be harmful to people of all ages, with children, infants and foetuses being particularly at risk. Health effects of lead, include reduced intelligence quotient scores and intellectual deficits.

The main sources of exposure for infants and children are food and drinking water, household dust, soil, and mouthing of products containing lead.

Workers are at high risk, of exposure as large quantities of lead can be released during manufacturing, application and removal of lead paint.

A significant proportion of housing in developed countries still contains legacy lead paint.

At the second meeting of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM2) in 2009, lead in paint was recognized as an issue of concern.

The Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint (Lead Paint Alliance) was established and included in its business plan the target that by 2020 all countries should have legally binding controls on lead paint.

3. Existing instruments and actions

It has been more cost-effective, as well as more protective to public health, to stop the manufacture and sale of lead paint than to remediate homes and other buildings and deal with the health consequences of lead exposure after the fact, particularly as safer alternatives to lead compounds in paints have become available at similar cost.

A number of instruments are in place or are being developed to address the phase-out of lead paint from the market. As of 31 December 2021, 84 countries have legally binding controls to limit the production, import and sale of lead paints, which is 43% of all countries.

For more detailed information on lead in paint, please see Chapter 3.6 of the ***Assessment Report on Issues of Concern*** and Part A, Chapter 6 of the ***Annexes to the Assessment Report on Issues of Concern***. Available on the UNEP website.

3. Existing instruments and actions (cont.)

Legally binding instruments are complemented by other non-legally binding instruments, including voluntary standards and voluntary phase-out by major multinational paint manufacturers.

Intergovernmental organisations and the lead paint alliance continue to play an important role in phasing out lead paints, including organising awareness raising events, developing guidance and tools for policymakers who are interested in setting up laws on restricting lead paints, and assisting countries in developing legal limits.

4. Challenges and opportunities

The majority of countries have yet to remove all lead paints from their markets, which may also impact other countries.

The scope of control measures may vary considerably among countries with legally binding or voluntary instruments. Not all these instruments are as protective as they are intended to be.

While lead paint regulations have been adopted and implemented in many countries, monitoring and enforcement is still an issue in some of these countries.

A number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and informal economy participants face obstacles in reformulating their paints, e.g. a lack of awareness and knowledge of where they may obtain lead-free raw materials.

Stepping up global efforts is needed to ensure a complete phase-out of lead paint, including;

- Scaling up awareness-raising activities and technical assistance in establishing legal limits; and
- Establishing legally binding instruments together with the other uses of lead.

Efforts are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of control measures and improve them if necessary. Parallel efforts addressing the trade of lead pigments may also be useful in accelerating the phase-out in countries still using lead paints. At national scales, innovative initiatives to foster voluntary actions should also be considered and encouraged.

Efforts should be made to foster effective monitoring and enforcement in all countries, including ensuring the presence of necessary laboratory infrastructure and scientific and other capacities in developing and transition countries.

The specific needs of SMEs and informal economy participants should be taken into consideration when designing and implementing suitable instruments to address the sound management of lead in paint, e.g. by including components that provide technical and financial assistance to SMEs.

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