

## Lead and Mercury and our Students

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An art history professor once told me that in art, “any difference makes a difference”. The same can be said about our environment. Each strand in the web is connected to all other strands.

The destruction of a whale’s nursery waters or the disposal of radioactive wastes affects our world and that of our descendents, even if indirectly. Other issues can be more direct. We have written in this newsletter about air quality in our schools and buses. Other issues that directly affect us and our students include pesticides, lead, and mercury toxicity.

Lead poisoning in children profoundly affects their nervous systems and cognitive development. Since lead was removed from gasoline, the primary source of the toxin in children is now due to their ingestion of old lead-based paint from flaking chips. **It has been reported that one out of every five children in Cleveland has toxic levels of lead in them.**

Mercury affects the nervous system also. A number of students in special-education classes have elevated levels of mercury in their bodies. A significant source of mercury ingestion in Ohio comes from eating fish. Some species of carp and catfish have extremely high levels of mercury. All Ohio fish including perch and walleye have recommendations from that state concerning how often they should be eaten.

Even fish from waters in pristine watersheds contain levels of mercury. A large source is due to releases from industry and power-plant smokestacks. Like the source for acid rain, the toxins are emitted into the atmosphere and later return to each in rainfall. This is the origin of contamination in watersheds that contains no industry or other obvious sources of mercury. The current administration is reversing the trend of increasing the regulation of such pollution. Unfortunately, it is instead loosening regulations on the industries involved.

For more information about lead, go to [www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead) and <http://www.cdc.gov/lead/>. For more information about mercury, see [www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts46.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts46.html) and <http://peakstoprairies.org/p2bande/construction/c&dwaste/mercury.cfm>. For more information about problems due to pesticide use in our schools, contact the Ohio Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides at [www.beyondpesticides.org/ocamp](http://www.beyondpesticides.org/ocamp).