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DAMAGED LIVES | LEAD'S TOXIC TOLL

Hazards lurking in soil as children play



PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press

GETTING A READING: Eric Powell takes a soil sample as Aila Shah does a position reading in Pontiac in June. The research aides at Xavier University in New Orleans were part of a team that took soil samples for the Free Press to determine lead content.

TESTING:
High lead levels
abound in Detroit
and metro area

NATIONWIDE:
Little is done;
paint problems
get most cash

By WENDY WENDLAND-BOWYER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Lead-contaminated soil is widespread throughout metro Detroit, especially in the urban core where many of Michigan's poisoned children live, a Free Press investigation has found.

Soil tests commissioned by the newspaper show dozens of locations — from Rochester Hills to Detroit to Canton — with lead levels that have triggered clean-ups in other U.S. communities.

But most of the sites will never be cleaned up. That's because the national strategy for preventing lead poisoning focuses on paint, the main contamination source for children.

COUNCIL WANTS
ACTION ON LEAD

Detroit City Council member Sharon McPhail wants to create an independent lead commission that would oversee all lead-abatement grant programs in the city. 11A

Meanwhile, thousands of children in America's older, industrial cities grow up playing in toxic dirt in their backyards and neighborhoods.

Some scientists say the nation needs to pay more attention to lead in soil, because it increases the exposure for children and adds to lead buildup in their bodies.

"One of the things that bothered me for a long time is what I think might be construed as an overemphasis on lead in houses," said Dave Johnson, a chemistry professor at the State University of New York in Syracuse who has studied lead contamination in soil.

"There is no question that lead paint is a hazard. But I think we might do some of our children a disservice if we don't look any further."

Nobody knows how many children are poisoned from playing in tainted soil — putting dirty fingers and toys in their mouths, or eating lunch without washing their hands. Some research says children can tolerate just 6 micrograms of lead per day, an amount smaller than a grain of salt. But there is no clear science yet about how much dirt a child would have to ingest at various levels of contamination before being poisoned.

The reason most contaminated sites are ignored is that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency tends to pursue cleanups only when a clear polluter can be identified and held accountable. At times, local development ef-

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CHILDREN FIRST
SPECIAL REPORT

TODAY

- Few kids tested despite the lack of expense. 8A
- How to get help. 8A
- Advice about soil, where to get testing. 9A
- A cross-section of contamination. 10A
- Soil-removal costly in Hamtramck. 10A

FRIDAY



Children still suffer learning disabilities from lead paint poisoning despite education campaigns. Avery Kukla's mother says he's one of them.

SATURDAY



What experts say it will take to significantly reduce childhood lead poisoning locally, statewide and nationally.



To read previous installments of this 5-day series, and for results from 400 tri-county soil tests, go to www.freep.com/lead



TUESDAY: Amid questions of financial mismanagement, Michigan's lead-poisoned children often don't get help from government cleanup programs. Janiya Williams, above, has a history of lead poisoning.



WEDNESDAY: A Detroit lead smelter spewed toxic dust into the air for decades — but to this day the neighborhood around it has never been cleaned up.

U.S. firepower
a growing force
in Persian Gulf

Experts say troops
total about 200,000

By TOM INFIELD
KNIGHT RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

WASHINGTON — With rising intensity, the U.S. military is deploying much of its firepower to the Persian Gulf region.

The Bush administration continues to say that no decision on a war with Iraq has been made. But the momentum for battle is building — and fast.

On Monday, the Army announced orders for a 30,000-member task force, including the 4th Infantry Division at Ft. Hood, Texas, to begin rolling out. The 3rd Infantry Division, from Ft. Stewart, Ga., already was en route with 19,000 soldiers.

During the weekend, orders were sent down from the Pentagon for the Navy to dispatch a

FAITHS ARE TESTED

- The Iraq crisis causes new tensions among Mich. religious leaders. 1B
- News from other world trouble spots. 5A

third and a fourth aircraft carrier-battle group to the region, each with about 8,000 personnel, 80 aircraft and a flotilla of smaller warships.

Late last week, an amphibious task force consisting of seven ships carrying a total of 10,000 Marines and sailors set sail from California. The number of Marines in the gulf, including members of a second task force that had set sail from the East Coast three days earlier, will soon approach 20,000 — with more probably on the way.

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Kmart CEO salary
reflects lean times

Analyst says \$1-million level makes more sense

By JENNIFER DIXON
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Kmart will pay its new chief executive \$1 million a year — a BlueLight special compared with the lavish checks the discount gave the men at the top as it was spinning toward bankruptcy.

In addition to his salary, Julian Day will get \$1 million when the company comes out of bankruptcy and annual bonuses of up to \$4 million starting in 2004.

And Jim Adamson, Kmart's chairman for the past year and its chief executive for 10 months, is to walk away from the company with \$3.6 million in late April, when the retailer plans to come out of bankruptcy. Adamson also got a \$2.5-million signing bonus and an annual salary of \$1.5 million.

Former Chief Executive Officer Chuck Conaway, by comparison, took home \$14 million in his first seven months on the job, and an additional \$8.7 million in 2001 as Kmart's finances were collapsing. His top lieutenant, Mark Schwartz, made \$14 million in less than two years.

On their watch, executives

JULIAN DAY'S PACKAGE



\$1-million annual salary, \$1 million when Kmart comes out of bankruptcy and possible bonuses of up to \$4 million starting in 2004.

JIM ADAMSON'S PACKAGE



\$2.5-million signing bonus, \$1.5-million annual salary and \$3.6 million when Kmart comes out of bankruptcy.

used the corporate jets for personal travel, drove luxury leased cars, and shortly before Kmart became the largest retailer to declare bankruptcy, 25 of them pocketed loans of \$28 million.

Day, Kmart's third chief executive in less than a year, can use

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Tax services and spare
budget, coalition urges

By CHRIS CHRISTOFF
FREE PRESS LANSING BUREAU CHIEF

- What's taxed; what isn't. 5A
- How to be heard. 5A

LANSING — The biggest battle over taxes in a decade may be shaping up as Gov. Jennifer Granholm and lawmakers begin wrestling with an estimated \$1.8-billion budget deficit projected for next fiscal year.

Granholm, a Democrat, and key Republican legislators, whose party controls both houses, say they oppose higher taxes. Granholm pledged not to raise taxes during her campaign last fall.

But a potentially large coalition of education groups, local

governments and social service providers will meet Friday to map out a campaign to make the case for tax increases to avoid deep cuts in state services and grants during the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

One change under discussion is a sales tax on services, in return for lowering the sales tax on goods from 6 to 5 percent. Depending on what services were taxed (advertising, entertain-

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>KNIGHT RIDDER<



SNOW SHOWERS
Windy and very cold.
Jerry Hodak's forecast, 7G

15
HIGH
5
LOW



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INFORMATION FOR LIFE

SOIL | High lead levels abound in metro area

From Page 1A

forts also prompt cleanups because lenders, fearing liability, require it.

EPA officials say the reason for a limited number of cleanups is simple: money.

"If we got into cleaning all those urban lead areas, it would be phenomenal, the cost associated with it," said Mike Sanderson, Superfund division director for the EPA region overseeing Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri.

Many high lead readings

Detroit has a higher percentage of lead-poisoned children than the national average.

To see how much lead was in soil throughout metro Detroit, the Free Press commissioned a study by Howard Mielke, a professor of environmental toxicology at Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans. He has published extensive articles on lead contamination in soil.

Mielke and a research team collected 406 samples throughout Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. The team found that 41 samples had lead levels above 400 parts per million, the EPA's level of concern for children's play areas. An additional 132 showed more than 140 ppm, the guideline Canada sets for residential areas.

In general, most of the areas with high lead levels were in Detroit, with the amount of lead in the soil decreasing farther from the city.

For example, they found a lead level of 9 ppm on a piece of property along a residential street near 22 Mile and Hayes in Macomb Township. A piece of property along a street in northwest Detroit, near Wildemere and Midland, showed a level of 189 ppm. And a spot north of downtown Detroit, at Beaubien and Erskine, had 752 ppm — nearly double the EPA guideline for children's play areas. This area is surrounded by elegant brick homes, vacant lots and the Brewster Homes, a public housing complex.

Lead occurs naturally in the soil, usually at levels below 50 ppm. In Michigan, a 1995 report to Gov. John Engler from the lead panel of the Michigan Environmental Science Board cited a state survey that found levels generally between 2.5 and 55 ppm.

But in the Free Press survey, many sites had much higher levels.

One sample from a Rochester Hills neighborhood of spacious brick colonials near Tienken and Brewster roads tested at 810 ppm.

Far more typical of outer suburbs, however, was a sample taken in Ken and Lori Ann Karam's subdivision near Brewster and Walton in Rochester Hills. Tests showed 4 ppm in the neighborhood of tudors and brick colonials, built in the 1980s. The results were among the lowest found.

The Karams have two children — Christopher, 4, and Patrick, 2 months — and were relieved by the news.

"When you have small children, you are concerned about these things," said Lori Ann Karam, 32. "One of the reasons we were not interested in an old house was because of the lead in the paint."

The news was not as good elsewhere. On a residential street south of 9 Mile off Warner in Warren, a lead soil reading came back at 398 ppm — two points shy of the level the federal government says can be harmful for children.

Renee Kazmirowski, 35, lives in the neighborhood of tidy red brick ranches. She said she and her husband, Tom, never gave lead poisoning a thought.

"I'm a little surprised, a little worried," said Kazmirowski, who has an 11-year-old daughter, Erin, and 2-year-old son, Tommy. Kazmirowski said Tommy has never been tested for lead poisoning. But now it is something she plans to bring up with her son's pediatrician.

Several samples taken in Pontiac showed some of the highest readings in Oakland County. One sample near Jefferson and Euclid revealed 495 ppm. Another sample, taken from along Saginaw Street near Lewis, had a reading of 390 ppm.

Lynette Zanon, 33, who lives near where the sample was taken, said she wasn't surprised to hear of the high level. A foundry used to operate about a quarter-mile from her house. A dark, smelly soot used to spew out of the stacks, covering the surrounding



CHIP SOMODEVILLA/Detroit Free Press

AIR QUALITY ISSUES: The Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Facility's incinerator looms as Otis Myles walks with his family in Detroit on Jan. 6. Michigan Department of Environmental Quality reports show the incinerator spewed 396 pounds of lead into the air in 1998-2001. The ZIP code around the incinerator had the highest percentage of tested children with elevated lead levels, a Harvard report said.

ground, she said.

She said she suspects the foundry, which closed about a dozen years ago, polluted the neighborhood.

Many researchers, including Mielke, attribute much of the high lead levels in soil to decades of leaded gasoline use. Lead was in automobile gasoline until 1986.

In the late 1970s, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found 88.2 percent of all American children between ages 1 and 5 had a blood-lead level greater than 10 micrograms per deciliter, the level considered by the government to be a safety concern. When a new version of the study was done in the early 1990s, the percentage of children in that danger range had dropped to 4.4 percent. Much of the decline was attributed to the elimination of leaded gas.

When lead was in gasoline, it literally spewed from cars in a fine particle mist. When the mist hit a building, the particles slid to the

ground and collected at the foundation, Mielke said. This explains why the soil at the foundation of many brick buildings has high lead levels, he said, even if the buildings had no lead paint.

Mielke has studied traffic patterns in New Orleans and Thibodaux, a small older city near it, and discovered that intersections with 100,000 cars passing through them daily had about 10 times as much lead in the soil as intersections with about 10,000 cars passing through. Traffic volumes, he said, help explain why smaller, old cities have less lead in the soil than old, larger ones.

In Michigan, cars and trucks emitted about 182,000 metric tons of lead between 1950 and 1984, Mielke said. Lead is heavy and doesn't evaporate. So it remains long after it was deposited.

Lead also came from industrial sources. In 2000, for instance, Michigan companies released 24,345 pounds of lead and lead compounds in the air, according

to the EPA's Toxic Release Inventory. That was the most recent year numbers were available.

Between 1996 and 2000, the New Haven Foundry in northern Macomb County ranked first or second on the list. The foundry in downtown New Haven released 52,872 pounds of lead in that time, the EPA reports show. It closed and filed for bankruptcy in 2001.

Bernardo Sia, senior environmental engineer with the DEQ's air quality division, said the foundry broke no laws. As an older facility, it had no lead-release limits, he said.

Conflicts over guidelines

Most money to fight lead poisoning today is directed at removing lead paint in housing. One reason is that researchers don't all believe high amounts of lead in soil significantly contribute to high blood-lead levels in children.

A report commissioned by the EPA, called "A Three-City Lead Study," found that reducing lead in soil shrank blood-lead levels in some children, but not always in a statistically significant amount.

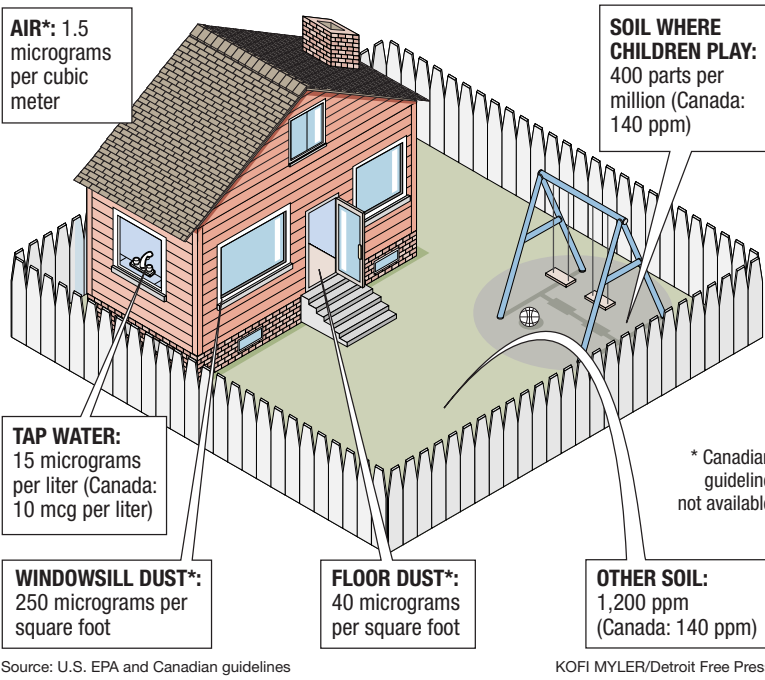
In 1992, the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, after reviewing a variety of studies, issued a report showing some scientists found anything above 100 ppm of lead in soil could be unsafe. Others found anything above 1,000 ppm might be of concern.

"There's no one number all the studies pointed to," said Lynn Goldman, a professor in environmental health sciences at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore. "If anybody tells you differently, they're saying that because that is their political point of view."

Goldman worked at the EPA during the Clinton administration and led the division that set the 400 ppm soil guideline for children. The guideline said anything above 1,200 ppm overall in a yard is of concern, but the levels should be no higher than 400 ppm in areas where children play. The guideline became effective after being published in the Federal Register two years ago, nine years after Congress passed a law asking the agency to create a guideline.

LEVELS OF CONCERN FOR LEAD

A child can be exposed to lead from a variety of sources besides lead paint. And because lead poisoning is cumulative, each exposure builds on the next. Here are some government guidelines for how much lead can be in soil, dust, water and air around a home.



Q&A

Protecting against tainted soil

QUESTION: How can I know if my yard has high levels of lead?

ANSWER: Several laboratories will test your soil for a fee, including:

- A & L Great Lakes Laboratories, Inc. Call 260-483-4759 between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays or write 3505 Conestoga Drive, Ft. Wayne, IN 46808. Cost: \$27 per test.
- Midwest Analytical Services. Call 248-591-6660, press 130 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays or write 2905 Hilton Road, Ferndale 48220. Cost is \$40 per test.
- University of Wisconsin Soil and Plant Analysis Lab. Call 608-262-4364 between 7:45 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays central time or write 5711 Mineral Point Road, Madison, WI 53705. Cost: \$18 per test.

Q: If my soil has high lead levels and I can't afford to remove the dirt, what else can I do?

A: Research has shown that if there is a protective layer covering the soil, a child's exposure to the lead is reduced. Growing thick grass, placing several inches of tree bark on the ground or covering bare soil with cement all help.

Q: I've heard that lead gets into house dust. How does that happen?

A: Two ways are pets and shoes tracking soil in from outside. Placing doormats both inside and outside doors can help reduce household dust. Better yet, have everyone take their shoes off inside the door. Have children wash their hands often, especially when they come in from the yard.

Q: Is there anything I should do to reduce lead dust?

A: Wash your window frames, windowsills and wood floors

weekly. A cotton mop is better than a sponge mop, and cleaners specifically made to pick up lead are best for windowsills. A mixture of dishwasher soap and water works well, too.

Q: I have a vegetable garden. Is it safe to eat produce if I live in an area with lead-contaminated soil?

A: It depends. One report from the University of Minnesota Extension Service says it is generally safe to eat produce grown in soils with a lead level less than 300 parts per million, because plants do not take in large amounts of lead from the soil. Vegetables produced from a flower — like cucumbers, green peppers or tomatoes — are also safe, according to a report from Cornell University, because lead does not concentrate in a vegetable's fruit. Plants may absorb lead through their roots, making carrots, radishes, turnips and root crops troublesome. Lead can also concentrate in leaves, making lettuce a potential concern. Lead dust from contaminated dirt can also get on the produce — or the gardener. Washing vegetables with a solution of water and 1 percent vinegar or 0.5 percent liquid dishwashing soap helps, according to Cornell University.

Q: Are there any other sources of lead in my house that I should watch?

A: Lead could be in your water if you live in an area with lead pipes or solder. Cooking by starting with cold water, letting the water run for 30 seconds to 2 minutes before getting a glass, and buying a water filtration device that removes lead and is approved by the National Sanitation Foundation all can help. Lead can also be in a variety of other products, including mini-blinds, necklaces and hair dye. For a partial list of alerts, visit the National Safety Council Web site at: www.nsc.org/ehc/nlic/alerts.htm

Sources: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Free Press research. Compiled by Wendy Wendland-Bowyer.

LEAD ASTRAY



A 1930 advertisement in National Geographic magazine boasts the high-powered performance of Ethyl leaded gas. The production of leaded gas was phased out in the United States in the late 1970s, but lead from auto exhaust remains in soil.

Sources: EPA Toxic Release Inventory, data analysis by VICTORIA TURK/ Detroit Free Press

JOHN W. FLEMING/Detroit Free Press

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FREE PRESS SOIL STUDY

Samples offer cross-section of contamination

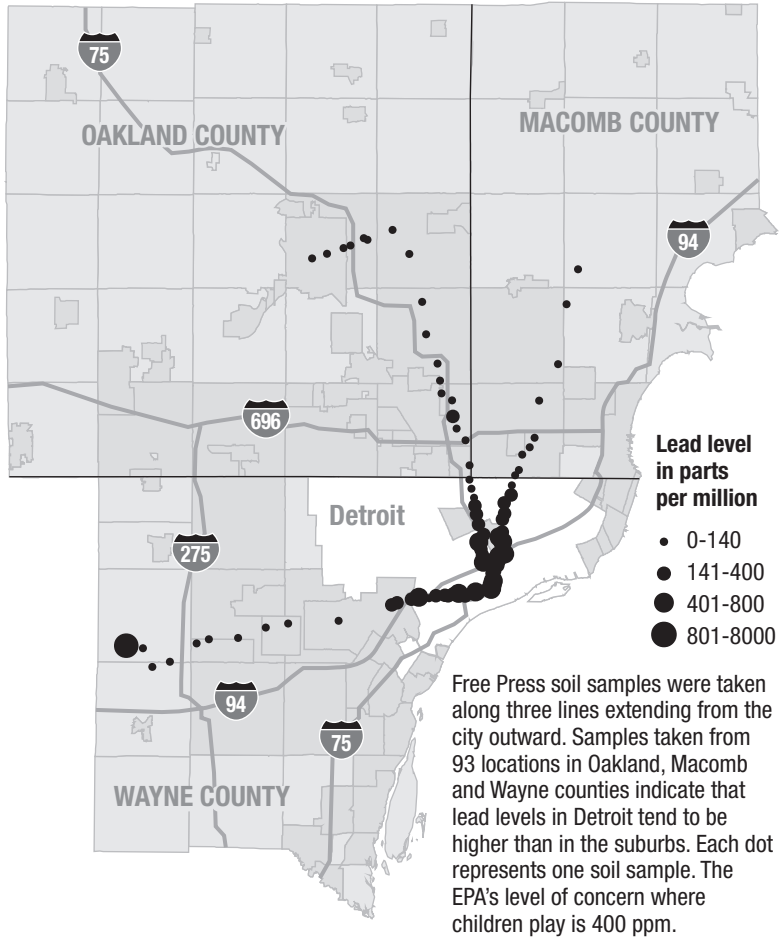
Data reveal higher levels within city

The Free Press hired experts to collect more than 400 soil samples throughout Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties and test them for lead contamination. The tests were done along three transects, or lines, running from downtown Detroit to the outer suburbs, and one small transect connecting downtown Pontiac to Rochester Hills. These samples were taken to get a sense of how contamination varies from urban to suburban areas. Samples were also taken in 10 census tracts in the three counties, and a handful of census tracts in a Detroit neighborhood. Sampling within these areas was designed to give a better sense of contamination within individual neighborhoods. The testing and analysis were done by Howard Mielke, a professor of environmental toxicology at Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans, who has published extensively on the subject.

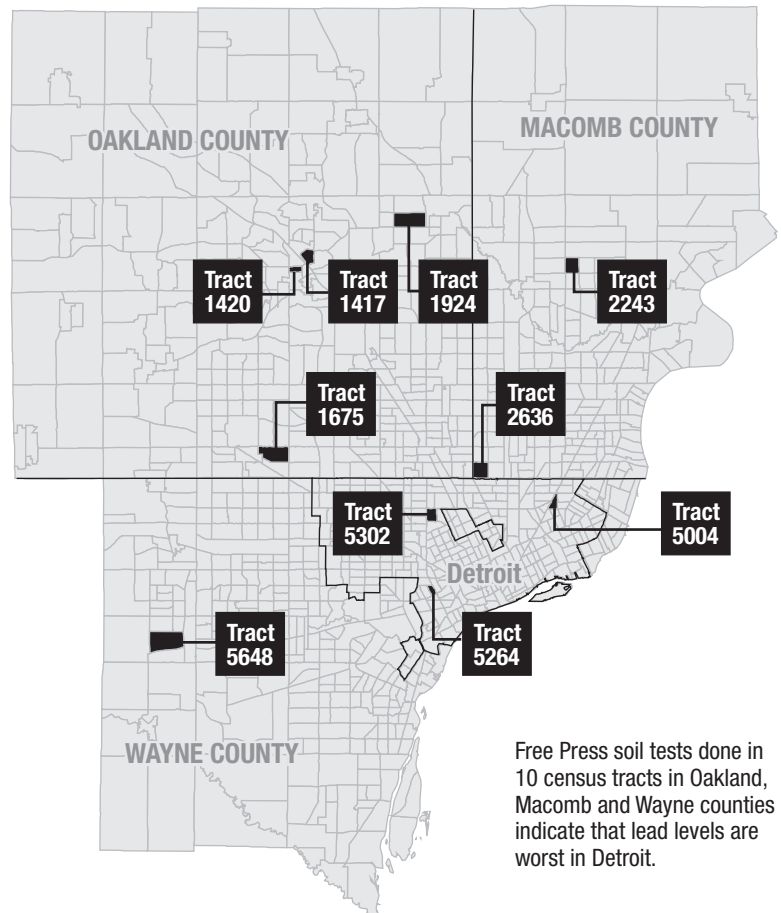
For each sample, about a cup of soil was collected from the top inch of soil — the area children are most likely to come in contact with when they play. The samples were carefully labeled, placed in plastic bags and taken back to Mielke's lab for analysis. Along the transects, samples generally were taken between the curb and sidewalks along residential streets. Major roads were avoided, because they were more likely to have high lead levels because of greater traffic. When studying the soil in census tracts, Mielke's team generally took 19 samples per tract along side streets, major roads, open spaces and the foundations of buildings. The tests generally found higher amounts of lead in the soil in inner-city Detroit, with the levels dropping the farther they were taken out in the suburbs. *By Wendy Wendland-Bowyer*

To view maps of the soil testing results, see www.freep.com/lead

TRENDS IN LEAD LEVELS



TESTING BY CENSUS TRACTS



TRACT	CITY	SAMPLES TAKEN	SUMMARY OF RESULTS			RESULTS BY PARTS PER MILLION RANGE		
			LOW	HIGH	MEDIAN	0-140	141-400	401+
1417	Pontiac	19	30	495	113	12	6	1
1420	Pontiac	19	15	166	58	17	2	0
1675	Farmington Hills	19	7	132	28	19	0	0
1924	Rochester Hills	19	4	810	11	18	0	1
2243	Macomb Twp.	19	8	39	13	19	0	0
2636	Warren	19	15	398	93	16	3	0
5004	Detroit	21	15	1,347	194	8	7	6
5264	Detroit	19	18	1,203	185	6	9	4
5302	Detroit	19	13	452	187	4	14	1
5648	Canton Twp.	19	4	67	12	19	0	0

Note: Figures have been rounded
Source: Data analysis by VICTORIA TURK/Detroit Free Press
JOHN W. FLEMING/Detroit Free Press



AMY LEANG/Detroit Free Press

NO ILL EFFECTS: Renee Kazmirowski, 35, holds 2-year-old son Tommy as he looks out the window last Thursday. Though the Kazmirowskis live on a Warren street near where a soil test found a lead level close to 400 on one site, Tommy has shown no effects of lead poisoning.

SOIL | Opinions, factors vary on precise danger threshold

From previous page

One reason for the delay was the absence of clear scientific data, said Dave Topping, an environmental scientist for the EPA's National Program Chemicals Division. Besides the variety of recommendations by researchers, it is also difficult to calculate how much lead children are exposed to when they play, Topping said. Some children may literally eat dirt; others may not want to get dirty. Also complicating the equation is how soil lead levels fit with other lead exposures for children, he said. For instance, a child in a city where the water system has lead pipes or lead solder may drink lead. A child in a home with lead paint or lead dust may eat lead. Lead can be in the air some children breathe, in canned food imported from other countries or in ceramics or leaded crystal. Topping said those multiple factors have contributed to scientists being unable to agree on a single safe number for lead contamination in soil. Another issue is how lead reacts in soil. If a child eats a lead paint chip, the child ingests a highly concentrated dose of lead. Lead in soil binds itself to dirt particles, making it less dangerous when it is ingested, some scientists say. "Lead in soil has not led to as much exposure of people as was initially suspected," said Valerie Thomas, a research scientist at Princeton University's Environmental Institute. "It gets more and more bound to soil particles, which means even if you eat it, you don't absorb it as much. Because we have so much lead in our houses, it makes sense to work on getting lead out of the houses, or tearing down the houses." But Johnson, the professor at State University of New York, said that doesn't mean lead in the soil should be discounted. Johnson recently concluded research that found a strong connection between high lead levels in chil-

dren's blood and their exposure to high lead levels in soil. His work, and that of others, also traces a rise in children's blood-lead levels during the summer and a decrease in the winter. Some researchers tie this to the role sunlight plays on a child's metabolism. The theory is sunlight draws lead out of a child's bones, where it is stored, and puts it back into the bloodstream. But other researchers believe the connection is from children playing outside in the summer in lead-contaminated dirt. The extra lead exposure then increases their blood lead levels. "Pretty quickly, you can convince yourself the amount of lead in the soil from using gasoline for 50 years is maybe just as important an exposure source as the lead in an old house," Johnson said of this research. Mielke conducted a 1996 study of the amount of lead on children's hands at day-care centers in New Orleans. By wiping the children's hands before sending them off to play, then wiping them after they returned, he found that children generally had 4 micrograms on each hand after playing inside, but had 28 micrograms on each hand after playing outside. When children get lead on their hands, it gets on their toys and into their mouths, Mielke said. He found a direct relationship between the amount of lead in soil and the amount on children's hands. **Determining cleanup money** The federal government's method for determining which sites should be cleaned depends largely on the land's use. If a lead smelter or some other industrial source can be blamed for contaminating an area, the site can qualify for millions of federal cleanup dollars. That happened in Eureka, Utah, where the Chief Consolidated Mining Co. caused lead contamination. *Please see next page*



CHIP SOMODEVILLA/Detroit Free Press

FOUNDRY MEMORIES: Lynette Zanoni, 33, center, poses with family at her home in Pontiac. From left are Eric Vickery, 16, Ashley Carlock, 13, Britney Zanoni, 10, and Daniel Vickery, 15. She holds her nephew, Anthony Zanoni, 1. Zanoni lives not far from where a soil sample had a lead reading of 390 parts per million, just below the level of concern based on government guidelines. A foundry used to operate about a quarter-mile from her house, and a dark, smelly soot used to spew out of the stacks, covering the ground, she said. It closed about a dozen years ago, she said.



SYLWIA KAPUSCINSKI/Detroit Free Press

LOW READING: Lori Ann Karam, 32, of Rochester Hills works while 2-month-old son Patrick naps. The soil's lead level in Karam's neighborhood was among the lowest found in Free Press tests.

\$500,000 CLEANUP

Removing bad soil is costly in Hamtramck

By WENDY WENDLAND-BOWYER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER
Removing contaminated soil can be costly. Just ask Hamtramck officials. Last year, the city was hit with an expensive lead cleanup in its efforts to develop about 100 new homes off Caniff, just west of I-75, in a partly industrial area that includes a patchwork of homes and vacant lots. Government officials had ordered dozens of soil tests to make sure the ground was safe for kids.

The tests found numerous spots with high lead levels. Although some tests revealed levels as low as 8 parts per million, many sections tested in the 400 to 500 range. Tests on one location came back at 11,000 ppm of lead. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says levels above 400 are of concern in areas where children play. State and county officials now want to remove about 10,000 cubic yards of soil from the site this year. It will cost the city about \$500,000.

Wayne County is overseeing the testing and removal. Derek Gideons, technical director of the Envirolytic Group, which is doing much of the environmental work for the county, said lead contamination problems are fairly common in urban settings. "It is pretty routine," he said. "It has been typical of our findings in seven years' worth of investigations in environmental cleanup." Albert Bogdan, Wayne County housing director, agreed the site

is typical. He also said it is impossible to know the source of contamination. The city still hopes to break ground this year for the homes, which had to be built as a result of a federal civil-rights lawsuit against Hamtramck. "It's been an education," said Rob Cedar, a member of the Hamtramck City Council and a director of an environmental group called HEAT, or Hamtramck Environmental Action Team. "But we're very glad we're addressing the lead issue."

From previous page

Bert Garcia, a supervisor in the EPA's regional office for Utah and South Dakota, said the agency is spending \$51 million in Superfund money to clean soil after high levels of lead were found. Children who played outside were being lead poisoned.

The EPA is trying to reduce lead contamination in the area to about 230 ppm. The agency also required the mining operation to help pay for the cleanup.

Soil with similar lead contamination can be found throughout metro Detroit. But the EPA has too few resources to clean up so many sites and must focus on the worst problems, said Bill Muno, director of the Superfund division of the EPA's regional office in Chicago.

The EPA estimated in January 2001 that 12 million U.S. homes have lead soil levels exceeding 400 ppm.

EPA Superfund money targets industrial pollution that may include extremely high amounts of lead in soil. Other EPA programs target lead paint in homes, because the EPA generally considers lead paint to pose greater risks than lead in soil.

"You have to use available resources toward the biggest risk first," Muno said. "You can get all worked up about lead in soil — and you may do something about that — but it may not have that big of an effect on the kids in the home, because the lead in the paint may be 90 percent of the problem while the lead in the soil is 10 percent."

But Donele Wilkins, executive director of Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice, an advocacy group, said underestimating the impact of lead in soil is a problem. Wilkins said she believes soil contamination contributes to the high numbers of children with elevated blood lead levels in Detroit.

"We believe there is a lot of good work being done looking at household contamination with lead paint, but not enough with



PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press

looking at the outside issue of lead in the environment," Wilkins said. "We believe this is one of the reasons there are such elevated levels of lead poisoning, disproportionately so, among our children."

Incinerator's role in question

In Detroit, the Free Press found some of its highest lead readings in a neighborhood on Klein Street near Conant. Tests showed 751 ppm.

"That is a shock," said Kirk Lompart, 52, who lives in a home on Klein that was once owned by his grandparents.

He said a foundry once operated down the street. He recalled that charcoal-colored soot covered the ground on some mornings when he was a boy. He said his grandmother had a garden in the backyard, and no one worried then about issues like lead.

In another Detroit neighborhood — just east of the Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Facility, an incinerator — soil tests showed high lead levels along three streets: 604 ppm on Dubois, 532 ppm on Jos. Campau and 695 ppm on Medbury.

Michigan Department of Envi-

ronmental Quality reports show that the incinerator released 396 pounds of lead in the air between 1998 and 2001. The ZIP code surrounding the incinerator had the highest percentage of Detroit children who were tested and diagnosed with high lead levels, according to a 2001 report by the Harvard School of Public Health.

Some environmentalists, including Ed McArdle, conservation committee cochair with the Southeast Michigan Sierra Club, worry that the amount of lead released into the air by the incinerator may be on the rise because more lead is thrown into the trash. A recent national report by the EPA concluded that an increasing quantity of electronic items are being discarded as waste. Many of those items contain lead.

The Detroit incinerator is the largest municipal incinerator in the country, according to Brad van Guilder, a Wayne County organizer for the Ecology Center, an environmental group in Ann Arbor. The incinerator is seeking to renew its operating permit, which is expected to be approved sometime this year.

TEAM HUDDLES: Howard Mielke, Eric Powell and Aila Shah look over a Detroit tri-county map at a gas station at Wayne and Glenwood in June. Mielke, a professor of environmental toxicology at Xavier University in New Orleans, was hired by the Free Press to conduct soil samples for possible lead contamination. Powell and Shah are research assistants at Xavier.

Once a year, the incinerator hires a company and sets a date for the company to test the amount of lead emitted from its smokestack. The Michigan DEQ approves and observes the testing.

Remilando Pinga, senior environmental engineer in the DEQ's air quality division, said the incinerator has never released more lead than allowed.

Mike Brinker, director of the incinerator, said it is impossible to link the readings found by the Free Press to the incinerator. The neighborhood, Brinker said, is near major freeways. He also said Detroit is an industrial city where major industries have operated for a century.

"It is certainly not that simple," Brinker said of linking the incinerator to the soil readings. "A soil sample at a point in time tells you what it is. It doesn't tell you when it got there or how it got there."

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DETROIT REACTION

Council calls for action on lead concerns

By EMILIA ASKARI
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Detroit City Councilwoman Sharon McPhail said Wednesday she wants to create an independent city lead commission to better coordinate all lead-abatement funds.

Other council members asked for a full accounting of how the city's lead-abatement money has been spent. They also want city employees to give them a report about lead contamination around the old Master Metals smelter featured in Wednesday's Free Press.

Grants to make homes lead safe are administered by both the city's planning and housing officials. About \$3 million in grant money has gone unspent for at least two years, the newspaper reported Tuesday.

McPhail wants to consolidate the grant programs, which have different eligibility requirements, under one commission appointed by the council and Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick.

"You've got lead problems that need attention in your house, you won't have to go through a big, winding, never-ending process with the city administration to get it," McPhail said.

Kilpatrick was out of town and unavailable for comment. Mayoral spokesman Jamaine Dickens dismissed McPhail's plan. "I think it's a little premature to jump out there and try to come up with a solution over-

night to a problem that's plagued us for years," he said.

At Wednesday's meeting, council members directed city officials to meet for at least an hour with lead activists including Wayne State University professor Lyke Thompson, an expert on lead-poisoning issues. Council members want Thompson and employees of the city's Planning Department to come up with a plan for how the city's lead-abatement money can be used more efficiently.

Councilwoman Sheila Cockrel praised the Free Press for its series on lead poisoning.

"It's a really powerful piece of journalism, speaking for people whose voices normally are not heard," Cockrel said. "We've got to get dollars in those houses and helping those children."

City planning officials had said they would ask the council for approval Wednesday of a \$1.5-million pilot program offering lead-abatement help to renters. They now plan to show the council their proposal today.

Councilman Alonzo Bates said the public needs to be more aware of the dangers of lead.

"It just shows you the kind of handicaps our young people face before they even get to the starting gate," he said. "Lead poisoning is a real issue, and it's infesting this town. . . . And we've ignored it because it's just such a big problem."

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