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LEAD POISONING: A SERIOUS PROBLEM

BY: SCOTT A. O'MARA

Lead in the blood — generally known as “lead poisoning” — has been found to be a substantial factor in the development of health issues. Studies reflect that blood lead levels (BLLs) develop and increase over a period of months or years, causing major health problems.

The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) have set a current standard for BLLs, indicating they should not be greater than five. CDC and NIOSH have studied the exposure which occurs at firing ranges and found that ranges which are not planned and controlled appropriately can present a substantial health risk for those individuals exposed to lead particulates at the range.

CDC and NIOSH have further learned that some intervention can limit lead exposure and the impact of lead poisoning, such as the usage of ventilation and/or airflow systems at the outdoor range. They also discuss the issue of not eating and not drinking at the firing range, as well as not smoking. The limitation and mitigation of health problems from lead poisoning at ranges requires further review regarding the use of lead-free primers and bullets.

The CDC/NIOSH studies also review the carryover of lead-based exposures which occurs when shooters do not properly clean themselves and their apparel when they leave the firing range to get into their car and drive home. The lead particulates can be readily transferred from shooters' clothes to their cars and then their homes, thereby exposing their families to the potential of lead poisoning from ingesting the lead into their bodies.

Also, ranges must be cleaned to remove lead dust from the soil to prevent it from getting into groundwater. It should be noted that lead particles in the air also can be transferred into ground water, posing a danger to all people living in that area.

As noted above, blood lead levels should be no greater than five, and preferably less than that. Continued exposure to lead poisoning at firing ranges is greatest for arms instructors; range masters; personnel with special assignments, such as snipers; and people required to qualify to use firearms.

The increased risk of lead poisoning resulting from greater exposure to lead can create dysfunction in the body systems of those so exposed. This poisoning can affect the bones,

nervous system, kidneys, eyes, teeth and vision, and can result in insomnia, headaches, memory loss, reduced libido, depression, abdominal pain, diarrhea, fatigue, wrist drop and foot drop. In addition, lead poisoning can affect the reproductive system and change the sperm level, as well as impact the ability of females to conceive.

In 1971, the Federal government based the use of lead-based paint in public housing. Then, in 1978, the ban was extended to the use of lead “in virtually any paint intended for sale to consumers”.

Exposures at firing ranges need to be minimized and controlled. On May 17, 2022, the City of San Diego Shooting Range was closed down because of its lead exposures. Besides ranges, lead exposure occurs in buildings built prior to 1978, and when batteries are consumed in car and truck fires.

If you have a change in your body system emanating from lead exposure, and that change is shown to be work-related, any resulting medical care which may be necessary — possibly for the rest of your life — will be covered by Workers’ Compensation. Employers need to be proactive in protecting all their employees from lead exposure. Otherwise, great harm and damage may occur to any individuals exposed. Ranges, in particular, subject individuals to potentially dangerous levels of lead exposure, in addition to car/truck fires, building fires and wild land fires.

In conclusion, protocol and methodology to protect people from lead exposure must be developed. In addition, you, as an individual, need to be aware of the need to “clean yourself up” when leaving the firing range, or when exposed to lead in any other setting — such as a fire — so as not to transfer lead particles to your car and then your family.

Protection from lead poisoning is needed NOW.



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