

FOREWORD

This report is an attempt by people of goodwill from all sections of the Lake Macquarie community to provide a sound basis for dealing with the very real threats to human well-being which are posed by the lead contamination in residential areas of Boolaroo and Argenton. The motivation of the committee members stems from an appreciation of the widespread concern among local residents. After the shock and alarm triggered when the results of the first blood lead level tests and then the soil survey results were released, the challenge for local people has centred on coming to terms with fundamental changes to both their lifestyle and their outlook. The challenge has included learning how best to have their voices heard to make sure that action is taken to address the problem. This 'bottom line' for local people, especially those with young families, was very clearly articulated by Sue Naughten, from the Boolaroo Argenton Community Task Force when she addressed the second Hunter Region Air Quality Summit at Newcastle City Hall on March 2nd 1992:

I have been asked to address you on the subject of 'Community Response', I suppose I could talk about many things, and give you many facts and figures. They are important of course, but I also feel that the issue of air quality goes further than a scientific view.

To quickly give you some background, we live approximately 150 metres from the actual smelter building. Our home, our yard, our daughter and myself have had lead level tests. The results were incredible:

<i>Our household dust</i>	<i>36,000 ppm</i>	<i>Vacuum Cleaner Dust</i>	<i>15,000</i>
<i>Ceiling</i>	<i>30,000</i>	<i>Front Porch</i>	<i>18,000</i>

I have been told that 700ppm in household dust is a reasonable level to expect. Our home is only 14 years old and has been renovated from the floor coverings to the ceiling paint. We had no earthquake damage and at one stage in our renovation actually hosed the entire house out. This was in February-June 1990. In other words it took only 12 months to reach the levels quoted.

Our daughter had a level of 18µg/dl and myself 8. Our soil levels were surprisingly low, well below the 1,000 mark. Obviously, we got some of the highest and the lowest results.

All test results were varied widely, but nevertheless positively indicated a serious problem with lead. It was this information that forced many changes in my life. In fact, not only was my life changed but also that of my community. It is these changes that I wish to talk about. They, to my mind, fall into three categories:

- 1. Increased workload*
- 2. Involvement*
- 3. Worry*

Workload

Before the lead issue arose housework was just something you did, mostly unwillingly. Now it becomes a critical factor in lowering lead in your house and therefore your family. You wet dust, you dust more often, you dust bizarre places, the screen doors for example. You vacuum more often, without your child in the room. That can be impossible. You wash hands, playclothes, clean fingernails, and you wash them well and often. After play, before meals, before bed. You wash their toys, every single thing touched. You watch them like a hawk, "Don't put that in your mouth". You put their stuffed toys in a bag somewhere, they carry dust. You move their bed away from the window. You keep windows and doors closed all day. You watch your child's diet. They must have calcium for example, they must eat well, regularly and in amounts that ensure their regularity. The list is endless, but these are just some of the strategies suggested to me.

Involvement

I became involved because of my daughter and my future children. Others became involved for many reasons, all of them valid. This involvement is something that none of us planned for. It takes us away from our families, our jobs and encroaches on our leisure time. We have to go out and talk to strangers, health officials, company people, community figures, the media and a host of others. We have to meet with open hostility, arrogance, ignorance and risk putting our foot in it almost daily. We are asked to speak in public, we re-organise ourselves and our families to attend meetings etc. This is stressful, and once again an endless list of points.

Worry

Worry, my third and final category. This is a big one. You worry that your house and your child are not clean enough (is it my fault?). You feel guilty if you just don't want to do all the work. If I don't clean properly, is it my fault? You worry that you're not spending enough time with the family. You think that your child does not have a normal life. You worry that you'll end up a compulsive cleaner. It's horrible to watch your baby being held down for a venous blood sample. You worry about all the different opinions that people have and if you're representing them properly. You wonder is it all worth it. You worry about your house being worthless because no-one wants to buy it. You worry about the 'Buffer Zone'. Has the lead affected your child? Will affects show up in the future. Grandparents worry for their grandchildren. Should you have more children? Is it your fault because you knew the smelter was there but you didn't get all the facts before you bought in the area? I could list the things that worry my community for hours. Try to imagine what it's like.

The lead pollution produced by Pasminco comes to us via stack emissions and in the dust carried by wind. It's not only the air in our lungs but what's in our environment. That's what poor air quality is and what I've said today is an example of the full extent of what poor air quality can do. Of course, it's important to remember what it does to community health on a

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surface level, but consider again what I've told you today. It goes beyond that, it permeates every single aspect of our lives. Nobody in Boolaroo or Argenton has been left untouched by this.

Finally, I would like to say we need a lot of changes to occur to lower the risks we have unwittingly exposed ourselves and our families to. Some are already here or being planned and that's good. We still need more however, we need them soon, to restore normality and above all, peace of mind.