UC study: Lead-based paints common worldwide - Business Courier of Cincinnati

Environmental and occupational health experts at the University of Cincinnati have found that major countries, including India, China and Malaysia, still produce and sell consumer paints with dangerously high lead levels.

The report appears in the early online edition of the journal Environmental Research, to be published in September 2006.

The researchers say the lead-based paint production poses a global health threat, and a worldwide ban is urgently needed to avoid future public health problems.

Lead is a malleable metal previously used to improve the durability and color luster of paint used in homes and other buildings and on steel structures, such as bridges. Now scientifically linked to impaired intellectual and physical growth in children, lead is also found in some commonly imported consumer products, including candy, folk and traditional medications, ceramic dinnerware and metallic toys and trinkets.

In a two-year study headed by Scott Clark, the UC-led research team found that more than 75 percent of the consumer paint tested from countries without controls -- including India, Malaysia and China -- had levels exceeding U.S. regulations. Collectively, the countries represent more than 2.5 billion people.

In Singapore, which enforces the same lead restriction on new paint as the United States, lead levels were significantly lower.

"Paint manufacturers are aggressively marketing lead-based paints in countries without lead content restrictions," Clark, professor of environmental health at UC, said in a press release. "In some cases, companies are offering the same or similar products, minus the lead, in a regulated country."

The UC-led team analyzed 80 consumer paint samples of various colors and brands from India, Malaysia, China and Singapore to determine the amount of lead and compare them with U.S. standards.

About 50 percent of the paint sold in China, India and Malaysia -- none of which appear to have regulations on lead -- had lead levels 30 times higher than U.S. regulations.