

Green Party of St. Louis

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GREEN PARTY SAYS EPA MISSED THE BOAT ON LEAD

May 27, 2006. St. Louis, Missouri. “When the EPA proposed rules on lead it missed a golden opportunity to take leadership in eliminating this poison,” says Don Fitz, spokesperson for the Green Party of St. Louis. “Instead of protecting public health, the EPA is trying to avoid areas it needs to address, replace good testing procedures with bad ones, and roll back some of the most important safeguards we have.”

In 1992, Congress instructed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to draft rules for safe lead practices by 1996. After ignoring its mandate for 10 years, the agency unleashed a storm of controversy when it finally proposed rules on January 10, 2006. The deadline for comments passed on May 25 and the agency is expected to make a final decision in early 2007.

“The EPA’s proposal ignores multiple issues that affect children,” charged Jasmine (Audrey) Ruiz-Smith who is running as a Green Party candidate for Collector of Revenue for the City of St. Louis. “The rules say nothing about unsafe work practices on the exterior of buildings that can spread lead dust on streets, playgrounds and schoolyards. Most of the money for property taxes goes to schools and, as Collector of Revenue I want to make sure those schools are safe.” Ruiz-Smith also criticizes the EPA proposal for being silent on lead inspections in 14,200 day care centers that currently have lead-based paint hazards. These centers care for about ½ million children.

Greens strongly disagree with the EPA’s intent to change the way lead contamination in buildings is measured. For years, the accepted practice has been “dust wipes,” which gather dust from key areas on a cloth that is then sent to a lab for analysis. Instead, the EPA proposed to use its own “white glove” test. It would also gather dust on a cloth but would rely on visual inspection and not lab work to determine if a home is contaminated.

Research shows that “dust wipes” correlate with children’s blood lead levels, but there is no similar verification for the “white glove” method. Ruiz-Smith says that “It is outrageous that the EPA wants to save \$10 on a lab analysis when the lifetime cost of lead poisoning a child is \$723,000.”

Perhaps most controversial is the EPA’s proposal to get rid of guidelines banning “dangerous work practices” that could release lead dust and fumes into homes. This includes use of heat, flame and dry sanding to remove lead paint.

According to J’Asa (Jerry) McCaleb, “Before these practices were banned, many children were poisoned when home remodeling disturbed lead that was in paint. The EPA is suggesting that we unlearn the knowledge people now have about safe practices and go backward to higher levels of lead poisoning.”

McCaleb is the Green Party candidate for Recorder of Deeds in the City of St. Louis. “I am a grandmother of children who live in this city. I want all children to live in a healthy environment and I do not want government agencies to tell us children are not poisoned when they are.”

At issue is how “lead poisoning” is defined. Over the decades, less lead has been required to define a child as poisoned as research has found lower levels damage health. Since 2000, new studies have shown that extremely low levels of lead damage math and reading skills and intelligence scores. According to Ms. McCaleb, “The EPA could have used its rule to say that a child who has any measurable level of lead is ‘lead poisoned.’ But it didn’t. It missed the boat.”