

From the Editor's Desk:

Ignoring an Issue Now May Result in Dire Consequences Later

Lead is an environmental toxicant that may deleteriously affect the nervous, hematopoietic, endocrine, renal and reproductive systems. Lead exposure in young children is a particular hazard because children absorb lead more readily than do adults and because the developing nervous systems of children are more susceptible to the effects of lead.

These are not words that many in stained glass are eager to hear. They are also not my words, and they have appeared on these pages before. What I have quoted above are the opening two sentences of the article "Update: Blood Lead Levels — United States, 1991–1994" that appeared in the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* and were in turn quoted by Jim Whitney in his abstract of the CDC report that was published in this magazine in 1998.

The CDC's wording was just as dire in 2005 when the *MMWR Weekly* published "Blood Lead Levels — United States, 1999 – 2002" and opened the article by saying "Adverse health effects caused by lead exposure include intellectual and behavioral deficits in children and hypertension and kidney disease in adults. Exposure to lead is an important public health problem, particularly for young children."

Longtime readers will know that I have addressed the safety of lead before, sometimes passionately, and have maintained — *and still maintain today* — that, when handled responsibly by professionals in the glazing of stained glass windows, lead is a safe and effective substance necessary in the making of architectural art glass windows. Furthermore, in the majority of architectural settings, lead is a safe and stable compound.



Richard Gross

It would be very fair at this point to wonder, if that is the case, *why I bring the spectre of lead up yet again.* We have, at the Stained Glass Association of America, seen an alarming rise in the number of people calling the headquarters asking for help or information about how to handle lawsuits in which they are being sued by a (generally former) employee for health problems that the person wants to blame on the employer. In the majority of these cases, the employer has a serious problem not because he is at fault but because he cannot prove it in court. Most of the people who are calling us did not test an employee's BLL when that person was hired, they do not test BLLs regularly or track rises and declines in levels, and they have done no air-quality monitoring in the studio to show the effectiveness of ventilation and the presence or absence of airborne lead.

In many of these cases, the employee is known to be doing sideline work on his or her own time, and, in at least one case, the employee was known to be smoking while painting at home on his

own sideline work. We all know that smoking or eating at the bench is a recipe for high blood lead levels; however, there is a long walk from "known to be" to "provable in a court of law."

I would hate for any of these studios that have contacted me recently (or, for that matter, any other studio that may be in the same situation) to end up being forced into bankruptcy because that studio could not defend itself in a lawsuit because it lacked adequate proof about the safety of the studio's employees in the working environment. When and if the lawsuit comes, it is too late to begin collecting data; *you need to have that information available to be able to illustrate trends over a period of years.*

The Association's pamphlet *SGAA Recommendations for Safety in the Stained Glass Studio* has information on what you can do to make the stained glass bench a safe work environment. This pamphlet is available at a very low cost from the SGAA Headquarters by calling 800.438-9581; it can also be ordered online at www.stainedglass.org. The Association also has an air-quality-testing program that is open to SGAA members; we offer this to help keep the cost of air testing as affordable as possible. Again, call the Headquarters to find out how to participate in this program.

It is tragic to see studios that are trying to do the right thing and take steps to make the workplace safe forced out of business because they did not take the necessary steps to be able to show that their studio is safe and to protect themselves from possible lawsuits.

Richard Gross