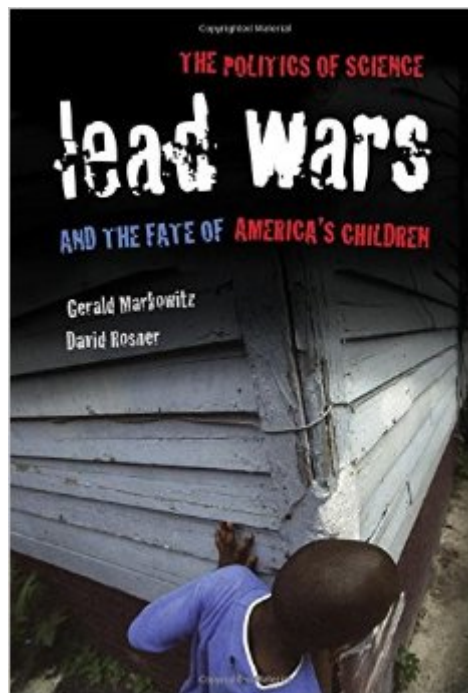


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# Lead Wars: The Politics Of Science And The Fate Of America's Children (California/Milbank Books On Health And The Public)



## Synopsis

In this incisive examination of lead poisoning during the past half century, Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner focus on one of the most contentious and bitter battles in the history of public health. *Lead Wars* details how the nature of the epidemic has changed and highlights the dilemmas public health agencies face today in terms of prevention strategies and chronic illness linked to low levels of toxic exposure. The authors use the opinion by Maryland's Court of Appeals, which considered whether researchers at Johns Hopkins University's prestigious Kennedy Krieger Institute (KKI) engaged in unethical research on 108 African-American children, as a springboard to ask fundamental questions about the practice and future of public health. *Lead Wars* chronicles the obstacles faced by public health workers in the conservative, pro-business, anti-regulatory climate that took off in the Reagan years and that stymied efforts to eliminate lead from the environments and the bodies of American children.

## Book Information

Series: California/Milbank Books on Health and the Public (Book 24)

Paperback: 328 pages

Publisher: University of California Press; Reprint edition (August 15, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520283937

ISBN-13: 978-0520283930

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars See all reviews (12 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #315,277 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #206 in Books > Medical Books > Administration & Medicine Economics > Health Policy #912 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Environmental Science #1494 in Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Internal Medicine > Pathology > Diseases

## Customer Reviews

Lead paint and "tetraethyl lead" poisoning of children resulting in brain damage and death represents one of the most hideous public health disasters in America. The Ethyl Gasoline Corporation manufactured "tetraethyl lead" because when mixed with gas, it improved vehicle performance and fuel economy. Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner wrote that "lead became part of the air Americans breathed when, in 1923, lead was introduced into gasoline to give cars more

power. With the dramatic growth of this vast industry, every American child, parent, and neighbor began to systematically incorporate into their bodies a toxic heavy metal that was already known to be poisoning workers in the United States and elsewhere."For decades, Medical Director of the Ethyl Corp., Robert A. Kehoe, M.D., gave "scientific cover" for Ethyl, and became the principal defender of keeping "highly profitable" lead in gasoline, which contributed to the poisoning of millions of American children from 1928 until TEL or tetraethyl lead was outlawed in 1986.

Industry-owned research facilities conducted lead studies, usually with pro-lead results; research was carefully crafted to benefit industrial sponsors, not the health of U.S. citizens. Incredibly, under oath in 1966, Dr. Kehoe told Congress that he and his colleagues at the Kettering Laboratory in Cincinnati, Ohio "had been looking for 30 years for evidence of bad effects from leaded gasoline in the general population and had found none." Kehoe argued that lead is "normal" in the human body and even recommended, for the sake of progress, elevating the lead level in gasoline. There was, he said, "not the slightest evidence" of harm from airborne lead, and claimed that leaded gasoline posed no risk at all to public health.

Back in the late 60's I was heavily involved in a program that attacked the problem of lead paint in Rochester, NY; this was a collaborative effort of the Rochester Committee for Scientific Information and the Urban League of Rochester. Ever since, I've been interested in the environmental lead problem. Markowitz and Rosner's *Lead Wars* provides an exceptionally well documented history of lead poisoning from its earliest times right up to the present, as, unfortunately, lead poisoning is still with us. Even low levels of lead ingestion have been shown to result in decreased IQ, hyperactivity, poor performance in school, and increased violence and crime rate. A major advance in reducing lead intoxication was the mandatory removal of tetraethyl lead from gasoline. The work of Clair Patterson and others had demonstrated that the use of tetraethyl lead had resulted in massive increases in environmental lead levels globally. The work of Herbert Needleman, Ellen Silberman and others had demonstrated that blood lead levels far below those producing acute symptoms (stomach cramps, convulsions, coma, death) caused neurological damage resulting in the symptoms mentioned above. So, despite major efforts on the part of industry to smear and discredit the researchers and to manufacture doubt, tetraethyl lead was banned. The correlation between the ban and large decreases in blood lead levels was spectacular. Lead-containing paint has been a tougher problem. Banned years ago for many uses despite industry's vigorous protest, lead paint still occurs in slum housing, where paint chips and lead-containing dust provide a source of the poison for young children. Complete remediation bears a price tag that slum landlords are unwilling

(and possibly unable) to pay.

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