

PREFACE

It is well established that lead (Pb) is a highly toxic chemical with no known physiological benefit. Exposure to lead can result in severe effects on the central nervous system. Particularly vulnerable to the toxic effects of lead are the foetus, infants, and small children. Depending on the levels of exposure, the effects on these sensitive populations can range from profound irreversible changes in the central nervous system to subtle effects such as lowering the IQ and impairing the ability to learn.

There are many possible sources of exposure to lead. Lead has been widely used in industrialization. Some examples are its use in paints, in plumbing, in batteries and in consumer packaging. It is also often released into the environment through industrial operations involving lead, such as mining, smelting, and producing or recycling lead containing products. One significant source of lead exposure has been through its use as an additive in gasoline. The purpose of this report is to provide a general overview of the global use of lead in gasoline, to consider some aspects of the contribution of lead use in gasoline to exposures, and to consider some of the technical and policy implications of phasing out this use.

UNEP Governing Council in its decision 18/35 May 1995 called upon Governments to give full consideration to the costs and benefits of phasing out lead in gasoline and urged countries that have already begun to phase out the use of lead in gasoline, as well as international organisations and financial institutions, to assist other countries in their efforts to achieve such a phase-out. The decision also invited the UNEP Executive Director to participate in these efforts.

Today, lead remains as one of the primary anthropogenic sources of environmental poisoning, disproportionately affecting the unborn and the very young. It is hoped that this report can contribute to progress in protecting this and future generations from this toxic substance.

Global Opportunities for Reducing Use of Leaded Gasoline builds on the UNEP-UNICEF brochure on *Childhood Lead Poisoning: Information for Advocacy and Action Produced in 1997*, and has benefited from the wider collaboration between the two organisations on children's health and environment issues. UNICEF expresses its support to UNEP's on-going work in this area, which further promotes the rights of children to a pollution free environment.

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