



www.purrfectplay.com

March 2009

Lead—What Goes Around Comes Around

The World is Getting Smaller

It seems to me that our world is getting smaller. Each time I write a newsletter I am struck by the interdependence of... well... everything! For example—lead in our pets' environment keeps presenting itself, at least to me, as a karmic loop. Let me explain.

Lead is showing up all over the United States in children's toys, in jewelry, paint, pet toys, components in various tools and vehicles, and the list goes on. Where do these lead tainted items come from? It seems that most of them are produced in China and India. Why China and India? Where do they get the lead? Why even use lead—don't they know that lead is a health hazard?

Who Do We Blame?

First off, lead is cheap. Lead and its heavy metal relatives add weight, heighten color depth and durability in paint, and give a high gloss finish. Simply put, lead adds surface appeal with little apparent cost to the producer. The cost of using lead gets dispersed throughout the community by the way of health issues in adult employees and developmental issues in children and pets. By using lead, manufacturers harvest a direct competitive advantage but seldom pay the cost for this choice, instead we all do.

It is easy to blame these overseas manufacturers, certainly I hold them responsible for their share—but what is their "fair" share? Our current market place requires products be as cheap as possible, so cheap that overseas companies have to squeeze every dime to stay afloat, so cheap that buying a new item is more cost effective than fixing the old one. Where do all of our broken items go, specifically those items containing small nuggets of lead, mercury, cadmium, and other noxious elements?

Where Does Our Lead Tainted Waste Go?

According to our Government Accounting Office (GAO) the Environmental Protection Agency has not been effectively following this electronic waste, to the extent that much of it ends up overseas. Seen as just garbage to us, items such as computer monitors, cell phones, and televisions are shipped to huge recycling centers in China and India. Here, poorly paid hand laborers smash, crack, melt, and cook old electronic goods and extract valuable materials. This process has terrible consequence for these laborers and their children. A study published last year in Environmental Health Perspectives found that children in these communities had lead levels 50 percent higher than those in surrounding villages and 50 percent higher than safety limits set by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sadly, these effects do not stay put. Much of the recalled lead tainted jewelry found on our shelves last year also contained tin and copper in quantities consistent with solder—solder used to hold electronic devices together. In other words, once the valuable lead, mercury, and cadmium are extracted from our electronic junk, these are used to produce trinkets and sold back to us. Trinkets containing our own dangerous waste—waste we had passed on and forgotten.

In the Service of Love

But what can we/I do about this difficult situation? It is a beginning to simply observe and try to understand. It is a beginning to see the world of "junk" in a different light and to know that items

don't just disappear once they leave our hands. Perhaps it would be helpful to reflect on *what* we throw away, and on *who* we throw away.

Challenging the status quo maintaining this unhealthy karmic loop is best done in the service of love—certainly this is one of the most important lessons taught by our pets. Many of us struggle to craft a world view that enfolds the love we feel for our pets. How do we extend this love into the world? How do we allow this love to go out and come back, helping us and our pets to stay healthy and whole?

Scientific American 2008 Article on Tech Trash

<http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=trashed-tech-dumped-overseas>

Tech Trash Comes Back to Us

<http://www.seacoastonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080804/BIZ/808040303&sfad=1>

Lead Testing Kits

Both Consumer Reports and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission find that home test kits are very unreliable with results all over the map—false positives and false negatives. Some reports suggest you can use the kits for a first line of defense, knowing they are not very sensitive, but most suggest that lab testing is the only true way to know if an item contains lead. Evidence continues to support avoiding jewelry items from overseas and brightly painted wood or metal as the most reliable way to avoid heavy metals.

<http://www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PREREL/prhtml08/08038.html>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/23/AR2007102302122.html>