

A conversation with IPEN, October 23, 2017

Participants

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Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by IPEN.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Mr. Beeler and Ms. Brosché of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) as part of its investigation into reducing environmental lead exposure. IPEN is a global network of organizations focused on reducing the prevalence of toxics, including lead paint. Conversation topics included the importance of lead paint, IPEN's organizational structure, the origins of its work on lead paint, its lead paint elimination program model, a case study of its lead paint campaign in the Philippines, its spending on lead paint elimination, its room for more funding, and its goals for the future.

Importance of lead paint

Prior to the 1970s, lead paint was applied extensively to homes in the US. By the end of the 1970s and 1980s, however, lead paint had been banned in all highly industrialized countries to diminish the adverse impacts that lead exposure was having on children.

Evidence of impact

In the 1970s, Dr. Herbert Needleman was one of the first researchers to demonstrate the neurodevelopmental damage that lead exposure inflicts on children in the US. Following his research, other studies established that removing lead paint from homes can cause blood lead levels (BLLs) to decrease.

Lack of generalizability

It would be impractical to attempt to calculate the global proportion of lead exposure attributable to lead paint. The degree to which a child's BLL is affected by the presence of lead paint depends on the specific individual and the country and area of the city in which they live. For some children, various other lead exposure pathways may be more impactful than lead paint.

Lead paint in developing nations

As low and middle-income countries (LMICs) develop stronger economies, many people in these nations begin to desire a higher standard of living, which includes

homes that can be painted. However, much of the paint available at local markets contains lead.

If lead paint continues to spread to homes in LMICs, there could be serious health and financial consequences for those nations.

IPEN's organizational structure

IPEN is composed mostly of organizations based in LMICs. It does not engage deeply in issues facing developed nations unless the issue also has a global impact. IPEN's leadership consists of a steering committee and an executive committee, both of which maintain geographic regionally balanced membership.

IPEN has established eight regional networks, noting eight organizations within IPEN are classified as "IPEN regional hubs". When IPEN begins planning a project in a specific region, the corresponding regional hub will assist in developing the project concept and identifying organizations in the area that are working on the issue. IPEN provides these local organizations with technical, scientific, and financial resources.

Origins of IPEN's work on lead paint

IPEN's initial mission was to address persistent organic pollutants, which are highly toxic chemicals. It became interested in lead paint after an Indian member organization raised concerns about potential toxics in children's toys. That organization conducted tests that confirmed the presence of high quantities of lead—mainly coming from lead paint—in toys across India. It hypothesized that countries around the globe were selling lead paint. IPEN then raised funding to conduct studies on paint markets in 10 LMICs across all inhabited continents. IPEN's testing found that all 10 countries had large levels of lead paint available for sale. In order to make lead paint elimination a global priority, IPEN brought the issue to the attention of global policy makers through two forums led by the United Nations (UN), the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

IPEN's lead paint campaign contributes to a cooperative initiative between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) called the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint. IPEN conceived its lead paint elimination program with advice from Scott Clark, a professor and researcher in environmental health at the University of Cincinnati. Professor Clark had prior experience in global lead paint testing and knew of areas more likely to have lead paint available for sale.

Lead paint as a proportion of IPEN's overall work

IPEN's work can be divided into four main categories:

1. Eliminating the world's most damaging chemicals
2. Reducing the prevalence of toxic metals (including mercury and lead)
3. Aiding in the formation of international chemical policy

4. Building a movement and global capacity for a toxic-free future

IPEN spends approximately 30% of its total budget on lead paint elimination. It devotes significant resources to this program area because the work is simple, non-controversial, and can be accomplished quickly.

IPEN's lead paint elimination program model

IPEN's lead paint elimination program commenced in 2008 and focuses on establishing national regulations that ban the sale of lead paint.

Process

Since 2008, IPEN has collected significant data on nations that may be selling lead paint and have not yet enacted lead paint regulation. Through its regional hubs, IPEN identifies organizations in these countries that are capable of and interested in working on lead paint elimination. It provides these local organizations with small grants to survey the local paint markets. If the results suggest there may be lead paint available for sale, IPEN and its partners conduct further testing. It disseminates test results publicly and engages with policy makers, industry groups, and other stakeholders in order to advocate for lead paint regulation. IPEN finds this model to be highly cost-effective, as dissemination of data tends to lead quickly to impactful change.

IPEN is currently working on lead paint elimination campaigns in 55 countries. Its goal is to have the majority of the world's nations enact lead paint regulation, at which point IPEN will begin to focus more on the enforcement of these regulations.

Working with manufacturers

A country typically has two to four large paint manufacturers, accounting for 50% to 80% of paint sold nationally. The remaining paint on the market is produced by small and medium sized businesses, which often operate out of garages or other small spaces.

IPEN's national lead paint elimination campaigns involve helping large paint manufacturers transition to producing lead-free paint. It discusses challenges and solutions with manufacturers, gives them advice, and connects them to potential sources of lead-free raw materials. IPEN finds that paint markets are impacted fairly soon after national manufacturers agree to produce lead-free paint.

Support from large paint manufacturers also helps IPEN incentivize governments to pass lead paint regulation.

Campaign timeline

IPEN has noted that it takes approximately two to three years for one of its lead paint elimination campaigns to achieve national regulation, although this estimate depends on how effective a nation's regulatory system is and how receptive the nation's government is to regulation. Lead paint is an issue that experts and policy makers agree can be resolved, and governments are typically enthusiastic to work

on eliminating lead paint. IPEN predicts that in the near future, its lead paint elimination campaigns will achieve regulation in less than three years.

Costs

IPEN generally spends a total of \$30,000 to \$60,000 to conduct one national lead paint elimination campaign. Most of the funds are granted in small amounts to partner organizations for various activities, including meeting with stakeholders, raising public awareness, printing leaflets, and organizing events.

The exact cost of conducting a lead paint elimination campaign ultimately depends on the specific country and its regulatory environment. For example, IPEN's campaign in India was costly and took longer to achieve national lead paint regulation, as India is a large nation and has a complex governance system. However, IPEN's campaign in Sri Lanka was less costly. After IPEN spent approximately \$8,000 conducting tests on the lead paint market there, it released the results to the public. Local pediatricians began writing articles expressing anger that lead paint was still being sold in Sri Lanka, and within a few months, Sri Lanka's government stated that it would develop a national regulation on lead paint.

Challenges

The main challenge in conducting a lead paint elimination campaign is that both national policy makers and manufacturers often do not fully know the consequences of selling and using lead paint, which can include increased risks for national financial stability and public health. Once stakeholders are made aware of these dangers, the primary challenge becomes navigating the political environment to get national regulation passed.

Lead paint elimination campaigns usually do not garner opposition. However, IPEN sometimes encounters resistance from small paint manufacturing enterprises that may not have the capacity to make their paint free of lead.

Focus on prevention over reduction

One approach to addressing lead paint involves approximating the reduction in children's BLLs caused by removing lead paint from homes. However, BLL testing is an expensive and slow process that does not guarantee increased impact. BLL testing can also pose ethical issues. Researchers that discover communities with high BLLs must bear the responsibility of finding some way to aid those communities. Moving individuals out of lead-contaminated homes is often difficult in low-income areas of a developing nation.

The approach of measuring BLLs to approximate the reduction caused by removing lead paint also presupposes that children's BLLs are already high. IPEN's lead paint work targets developing nations where lead paint has only recently begun to spread. Therefore, IPEN's work focuses on establishing national regulations that will prevent the lead paint markets in these countries from growing. It is reasonable to assume that BLLs in these nations would rise in the next two decades if national

regulations are not established, although it is difficult to know by how much. Lead paint regulation also tends to bring about lead regulation on children's products, packaging, and other materials—which may further prevent BLLs from rising.

Case study in the Philippines

Origins of lead paint elimination project in the Philippines

Several years ago, IPEN and its member/partner organization (EcoWaste Coalition) in the Philippines began conducting a study on the lead paint market there. The campaign moved slowly until IPEN received significant multi-year funding from the European Union (EU) that enabled it to continue work in the Philippines. It conducted a follow-up study that surveyed what paints were available and which paints contained lead at a concentration greater than 90 parts per million (ppm). The study confirmed that 69% of paints available for sale contained lead.

Process to achieve national regulation

EcoWaste Coalition then spent three years building a national coalition of paint industry leaders and government officials to eliminate lead paint in the Philippines. IPEN's partner organization built strong relationships with specific government departments as well as the Philippine Association of Paint Manufacturers, Inc., which of its own volition began conducting lead removal trainings and meeting with government representatives to advocate for lead paint regulation.

A national lead paint regulation was enacted in 2015, and it mentioned IPEN and EcoWaste Coalition as key actors to help implement the law. IPEN recently met with one of the largest paint manufacturers in the Philippines, who told it that lead paint regulation could not have been achieved without IPEN and its partner organization raising awareness. The most recent study conducted on the paint market in the Philippines found that only 24% of paints available for sale now contain lead.

Enforcement of regulation & shifting the market

To promote a shift in the market, IPEN's campaign developed a third party "Lead Safe™" certification for companies to prove and market their paints as compliant with the new regulation. To date, three national paint manufacturers, which comprise 85% of the paint market in the Philippines, have received the "Lead Safe™" certification. The certification process was conducted through SCS Global, a third-party environmental sustainability auditing group based in Emeryville, California. While testing paints from the manufacturers in the first round in the Philippines, researchers found that a small portion of paints still contained lead above the standard level, even after manufacturers implemented new policies to be lead-free. Manufacturers then investigated their plants and corrected the mistakes. This third-party certification model benefits both manufacturers, which can market lead safe paint and possibly charge higher prices for their products after receiving certification, and governments, which often have limited capacity to enforce regulation.

Other successful case studies

IPEN and its partners have catalyzed 15 countries across the world to adopt lead paint regulation. IPEN expects that approximately 10 more countries are in the process of enacting regulation due to its work and will do so in the next 1-2 years.

IPEN's spending on lead paint elimination

IPEN is the global leader for lead paint elimination and spends slightly under \$1 million per year on lead paint work.

In 2013, the EU provided \$3.5 million to IPEN, which it used to conduct lead paint elimination campaigns in seven countries over three and a half years. To IPEN's knowledge, these funds represent one of the largest single donations towards lead paint elimination. IPEN also received \$1 million from the Global Environment Facility for lead paint elimination in Africa and raised \$3 million more in co-financing to conduct lead paint elimination work internationally.

From 2018 to 2020, IPEN will be part of a lead paint elimination project funded with \$2 million from the Global Environment Facility and \$8 million in co-financing.

Global spending on lead paint elimination

The other main organizations funding global lead paint elimination work include the WHO, UNEP, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency. It is difficult to identify exactly how much each of these organizations spends on lead paint elimination, as much of their work on lead paint occurs through general pools of funding used to conduct multiple projects.

IPEN estimates that approximately \$2 million in new cash total per year is spent directly on lead paint work, including the \$1 million IPEN spends annually. The remaining \$1 million not spent by IPEN comes from IPEN's partner organizations independently raising funds to conduct lead paint elimination work. For example, a group in the Philippines may leverage an \$8,000 grant from IPEN to raise \$16,000 more from Catholic donors or European international aid organizations.

IPEN's \$2 million estimate is derived only from knowledge it has about its partner organizations and does not incorporate guesses about unknown organizations' work on lead paint or government expenses. The estimate also does not include indirect funds that some organizations may incorporate into their lead paint elimination expenses, such as the costs of attending a lead paint workshop or renting an office.

Room for more funding

Most of the funding that IPEN currently receives is project-based, restricted by donors to specific initiatives. Receiving unrestricted funding would enable IPEN to be more strategic with the activities it conducts. With an additional \$500,000 per year in unrestricted funding, IPEN would be able to:

- **Invest more in current campaigns** – IPEN could strengthen lead paint elimination campaigns in countries it already works in. For example, IPEN would like to escalate its work in Nigeria, the main paint exporter and producer in the region.
- **Expand to new countries** – With increased funding, IPEN would be able to aid more countries working towards national lead paint regulation. For example, a group in Colombia working on lead paint elimination has strong relationships with media, government, and the private sector but needs funds to achieve regulation.
- **Promote regional standards** – East Africa has developed a regional standard limiting the concentration of lead in paint produced in East Africa to 90 ppm, and West Africa is working towards developing a standard. Additional funding may allow IPEN to consider investment in the Eurasian Economic Union (which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Belarus, and Russia) to promote a regional standard for lead paint. IPEN could also use additional funds to enforce regional standards at a local level through third party certification.

IPEN believes that it would cost approximately \$20 to \$30 million to eliminate the sale of lead paint globally. IPEN also believes that \$75,000 invested over 2-4 years in some countries could result in the adoption of a meaningful lead paint regulation.

Goals for the future

By the beginning of the 21st century, most developed nations had enacted lead paint regulation. Since then, 15-20 LMICs have also enacted lead paint regulation. However, 70% of all countries have still not established bans on lead paint.

IPEN plans to achieve a “tipping point” by 2020, whereby 40 LMICs will have enacted lead paint regulation. After achieving this goal, IPEN expects that it will be a much easier and faster process to enact lead paint regulation in other countries.

IPEN’s internal target for enacting lead paint regulation in all countries is 2025, and the international policy community has proposed the year 2030 as a target for completely eliminating lead paint across the world.

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