



# 19790125 Northern Advocate article: Doctors back campaign for safer petrol in New Zealand

Includes:

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## Doctors back campaign for safer petrol

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Pressure is mounting in Whangarei to get the lead out of our petrol and save the mental and physical health of our children.

Marsden Pt refined petrol is boosted by twice the amount of lead as that of most European countries and the lead content has been condemned by scientists and health authorities as a cause of brain damage in children.

Today Whangarei paediatrician Dr Donald Beasley and the medical officer of health in Whangarei, Dr J. S. McKenzie-Pollock, added their support to a drive for lead-free petrol for New Zealand.

And the Victorian Government has asked the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council to investigate claims that lead released by car exhaust can cause a cut in children's IQ levels.

Dr Beasley, who has a special interest in the diseases of children, has made unsuccessful approaches to the Government about the dangers of lead. Today he supplied the Advocate with an American campaign label button exhorting Americans to "get the lead out."



An American label button urging the omission of lead from petrol.

He said that in many American states it was obligatory of oil companies to market lead-free petrol and he said the damage caused by the absorption of



DR BEASLEY

"In high proportions it can cause severe mental retardation and even small amounts can cause a loss of five to 10 points of IQ.

"I'm personally concerned and have been aware of the danger for many years.

"We have to work toward reducing, ultimately to zero, the lead in our petrol.

"Public opinion several years ago resulted in legislation which took the lead out of paint.

"I would strongly support a new approach to the Government about the lead in petrol. If we can get something started in Whangarei I think we could get somewhere nationally."

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Dr McKenzie-Pollock said he and a lot of people were worried about the effects of lead poisoning from car exhausts and he would "certainly" strongly support any move to reduce lead in the environment.

"It's a fact lead from any source does cause brain damage and I will do everything I can to reduce the amount.

"It's a national problem not only a local one and anything we can do to reduce lead in the community the better.

"This could cause

affects the mental growth of children."

He could not volunteer any technical suggestions for getting the lead out of petrol but said he thought health departments were "stronger" than big oil companies.

Visiting British science professor Mr D. Bryce-Smith told the Advocate on Monday the addition of lead to boost octane ratings in petrol was "a sloppy alternative to good refining".

In Auckland to address a science congress, Mr Bryce-Smith sharply criticised New Zealand-refined petrol for its lead which he said "gets pumped out of car exhausts for the 'benefit' of children on the streets."

Victorian Health Minister, Mr Vasey Houghton said yesterday he was concerned at the statement made by Professor Derek Bryce-Smith at the conference in New Zealand.

Mr Houghton said he had decided to refer the question to the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council with a request that it examine any possible dangers and report its findings as soon as possible.

On January 19, it was announced that the amount of lead allowable in petrol sold in Victoria, Australia, had been reduced to 0.45 grams a litre from 0.6 grams a litre when the programme was begun in 1975.

Today Shell Oil NZ Ltd public affairs officer Mr Paul Kelly told the Advocate from Wellington that adding lead to Marsden Pt petrol was a "numbers game of costs."

He said the lead was added because it was a cheaper way to boost octane ratings.

"One way round it is to import a lighter type of crude oil but this would cost more overseas funds and that's where it goes to the Government.

"Adding lead is a convenient way to boost octane ratings."



Handwritten notes: MGH, P.I.P., S. Lead, Todd, etc.