Opinions on lead ban or unleaded or lead free or safe

Leadnet* Emails Re: Pure Earth ILPPWA 2026 News: Mexico plans to ban lead in pottery

**Note about Leadnet:* *Leadnet is a free service about lead poisoning management and prevention, brought to you by the US National Center for Healthy Housing. For more information on NCHH and its programs, visit www.nchh.org*

A blank message to Leadnet-on@mail-list.com from the email address you wish to subscribe from - subscribes you to the list.

Once subscribed, you can post your message to the list by sending it to Leadnet@mail-list.com – c/o mail-list.com 1302 Waugh Dr. #438 Houston, Texas 77019 USA

These five emails were posted to Leadnet on 11th – 13th November 2026. For this compilation, square-bracketed explanatory text was added by Elizabeth O'Brien, The LEAD Group Inc, Australia

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***Email one** from **Phillip Bouton**, Columbus Public Health Program Manager 1, Lead Education and Poisoning Prevention / Healthy Children and Safe Homes by 2040; www.columbus.gov/lead*

Wondering if there is really anything new we can tell families with cultural roots from Mexico that like to use glazed pottery? Is Mexico implementing several new changes or mainly enforcing current standards on the books already?

The PR basically says this ban on lead glazes is being lowered from 600 ppm to 90 ppm but during visits to EBL [elevated blood lead) households we see glazed Mexican pottery in the tens of thousands ppm by XRF, so compliance will depend mainly on the glaze manufacturers transitioning to lead-safe glazes? Are there also small artisanal operations that make their own lead glazes that could continue to be a problem in Mexico?



2013 Volcano Art Prize (VAP) Entry. Artist: Svetlana Dylevskaya. Title: Buy lead free glazed pottery. Lead-Safety Message: "Buy lead-free glazes when making pottery or buy lead-free glazed pottery". Description of Work: Digital photo. https://volcanoartprize.com/portfolio-item/buy-lead-free-glazed-pottery/ [LID 17224]

***Email two** from **Eric Ritter**, [DetectLead / Fluoro-Spec](); [Instagram - Eric Everything Lead]()*

Hi Phillip,

I went looking for the actual announcement, since the newsletter runs a few things together. During lead poisoning prevention week in October, Mexico's health ministry and COFEPRIS [COFEPRIS stands for Comisión Federal para la Protección contra Riesgos Sanitarios, which translates in English to the Federal Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risks] (roughly their FDA [Food and Drug Administration]) said they're updating four of their official standards. The 600 to 90 ppm drop belongs to the paint one (NOM-003, [where NOM means Norma Oficial Mexicana] which covers paints, inks, varnishes, lacquers and enamels), and it brings Mexico down to the same 90 ppm the US uses for paint on consumer products. "Esmaltes" sometimes gets translated as glazes, which may be how that number got attached to pottery.

The pottery change is a separate rule (NOM-004) and it's the new part.

It would ban lead compounds as an ingredient in making, importing or selling glazed pottery, glazed ceramics and glassware, decorative and garden pieces included. Mexico's current pottery standard (NOM-231) works like the FDA's, where you soak the piece in a weak acid and measure how much lead comes out, and they plan to tighten those limits as well. That's why your XRF readings don't line up with anything on the books. A glaze reading tens of thousands of ppm can't be held against a ppm number because the current rule only has a leach limit.

A ban on lead in the glaze itself would cover what your XRF is picking up.

On timing, the paint and blood lead updates are furthest along. Drafts of both were published for public comment in January [2026] and comment closed in March. I couldn't find a draft or a date for the pottery [lead] ban or the tighter leach limits, so nothing has changed on the ground there yet.

And yes, small workshops are most of the problem. Casa Cem, a Mexican organization, visited 48 pottery workshops for a 2024 report on where the lead comes from, and only 14% had stopped using lead glaze.

Potters wouldn't say where they bought their lead and it came in unlabeled containers. The top glaze sample was 93% lead by weight, which is about what straight lead oxide is. They also found lead-free glazes for low-fire pottery available at competitive prices, so the technology isn't what's holding things up. COFEPRIS says the rollout won't be punitive. It comes with incentives to switch and a national lead-free seal that's free for producers, tested through the state public health labs, on top of the "Sin Plomo" [“unleaded” or “lead-free” in English] seal the national crafts fund (FONART) already gives workshops. The head of INSP, their national public health institute, estimated that getting lead out of pottery used for food could prevent almost half of child lead poisoning cases in Mexico.

For families in Columbus nothing is different yet, and pieces already in homes or brought back from visits aren't touched by any of it. What might help is the message Mexico's own

health officials used "Barro sí, plomo no" (“yes to clay, no to lead”) as the line for the week.

Hearing that from home-country officials may land better than hearing it from someone who may be viewed as forcing them away from something traditional, and it lets families keep the pottery and just drop the lead glaze.

October announcement (Spanish):

https://codigof.mx/mexico-prepara-nuevas-medidas-para-reducir-la-exposicion-al-plomo-en-la-infancia/

January drafts and comment period:

https://mexicobusiness.news/health/news/cofepris-opens-public-consultation-five-draft-noms

Casa Cem's workshop findings:

https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/Chavez_Arce_presentation.pdf

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***Email three** from **Mike Sharp**, Senior Safety Officer, Janus Corporation - Trusted Leaders in Demolition and Abatement Since 1989; www.januscorp.com*

All this is good info - but does anyone besides me have a problem with calling a reduction in lead a "ban"?

We do the same type of thing in the US - often calling materials "lead free" when they are not actually "free of lead".

This is a false sense of security that can be very harmful.



2026 Volcano Art Prize (VAP) Entry. Artist: Margaret Roberts. Title: Silly Goat. Lead-Safety Message: Don’t be a silly goat, check your house for lead paint. Description of Work: Photo. https://volcanoartprize.com/portfolio-item/silly-goat/ [LID 29933]

Email four *from* ***Elizabeth O'Brien****, The LEAD Group Inc charity, Australia;*
www.lead.org.au; www.leadsafeworld.com; www.volcanoartprize.com
Winner of the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) Award for Outstanding Service to the Environment https://lead.org.au/mr/20040605.html
Partner, Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles, of UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) https://files.mail-list.com/m/leadnet/80424793.html
Ally, "Lead Paint Alliance" - Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead in Paint, of UNEP and WHO (World Health Organisation) https://files.mail-list.com/m/leadnet/23604593.html
Partner, Partnership for a Lead Free Future (PLF), of UNICEF
https://www.leadfreefuture.org/about/partners-0

I totally concur Mike... I also have a major problem with calling a reduction in lead a "ban" and with calling materials "lead free" when they are not actually "free of lead" and I really felt a sense of panic about such nomenclature when UNICEF announced its "Partnership for a Lead Free Future (PLF)". I first wondered was UNICEF's plan to find a planet we could all move to that had no lead in the crust and therefore no lead being emitted by volcanoes or taken up by plants or other things that grow in the soil and therefore being emitted from wildfires. But my Google AI Assistant search result said: "No known planet is completely devoid of lead, as heavy elements like lead are forged in stars and distributed into the cosmic dust clouds that form all planetary systems."

So I investigated what UNICEF meant by "a Lead Free Future" and it's something like:

PLF's intention is to track progress and support coordination across the global effort to eliminate lead exposure that results in a blood lead level greater than 5ug/dL in 95% of LMIC children under the age of 5 by the end of 2040, or put more simply, the PLF's vision is that only 5% of pre-school age children in low and middle income countries as of 2040 will be born into a world where they will have lead exposure above the US CDCs previous reference level or what I like to call "blood lead action level".

I realized I'd have to go with the flow on that one - it being the United Nations and all - and shelve my idea that they might change the name of the partnership to "Partnership for a Lead Safe Future" and aim to keep every human's blood lead level below The LEAD Group charity's "blood lead action level" of greater than 1ug/dL and I'd have to let go of my desire for "lead free" to mean "lead free" so I joined my charity up to the PLF regardless.

But there's one use of the term "lead free" that I still hold out hope of changing, or asking keen Leadnetters to seek to get changed: it is that despite there being no such thing as "lead free brass" (if it doesn't contain lead then it is not brass, [although I've been advised since I wrote that that in fact there is the option that you not add lead to brass and thus you can have "unleaded brass" – still with significant amounts of unintentionally added lead – more research needed to confirm that]), the US plumbing products legislation defines "lead free brass" as brass with less than 0.25% lead in it. That's just all kinds of wrong and sadly, this lie has already spread to Australia (and I imagine every other country into which plumbing products made and labelled for the US market are also sold), such that, as of 1st May 2026,

plumbing products with less than 0.25% lead in them have been permitted to be marketed/labelled as "lead-free plumbing products". With some drinking water supplies in our country being particularly soft, and insufficient attention to the possibilities of new water treatments increasing the plumbo-solvency of drinking water, having brand new "lead free brass" taps installed in some areas is the pathway to drinking lead in your water, at least for a couple of months or years. The other problem that occurs from Australia copying the US definition of "lead free brass" and allowing low lead brass plumbing products to be marketed as "lead free" plumbing products, is that this terminology completely obliterates what should be a huge marketing advantage of stainless steel plumbing products to which no lead is added at all and which could, according to the detection limits available at most labs today, perhaps legitimately be labelled today as "lead free".

2017 Volcano Art Prize (VAP) Entry. Artists: Andriam Bala; Filmed: Elizabeth O'Brien; Film Edited: Malveek Kaur Dhaliwal. Title: New Brass taps often add lead to water. Lead-Safety Message: Test your water before drinking from a brass tap or rainwater system using a LEAD Group Water Kit or Comprehensive Kit. Description of Work: iPhone 4s Video. https://volcanoartprize.com/portfolio-item/new-brass-taps-often-add-lead-to-water/ [LID 18507]



Having this much confusion in English means it is no surprise that issues arise when dealing with another language. I don't speak Spanish but I found online today that "Sin Plomo" means either "unleaded" or "lead-free" in English. At least in English, unleaded is mostly used to mean that you haven't added any lead, whereas, apart from "lead-free brass" I think most people would expect something called "lead free" to actually be free from lead - despite this being a future perhaps impossible dream once you apply lab analysis to the item.

Not adding lead is something you can write in to legislation and enforce so using the term "unleaded" to do that works for me whereas the term "lead free" is virtually indefinable. What can be measured by one lab today as "non-detectable for lead" will assuredly give a detectable level of lead tomorrow in some other lab with more modern equipment.

To me, "unleaded gasoline" is a reasonable term considering that crude oil and thus unleaded gasoline always has some amount of lead in it - because there's naturally occurring lead in soil and therefore in plants and therefore in all fossil fuels. Similarly, "unleaded paint" is a reasonable term because you can legislate and enforce that no lead compounds be added to the paint sold, manufactured or imported in to your country and when you set an upper limit for lead in paint - like 90 ppm - you are basically limiting lead to 90 ppm which is comprised

of the naturally occurring lead in other paint raw ingredients like zinc.

2020 Volcano Art Prize (VAP) Entry. Artist: Elizabeth O'Brien. Title: Is 2020 the End of Leaded Petrol? Lead-Safety Message: The PCFV said in 2019, only Algeria still sells Leaded Petrol. Innospec in Feb 2020 still "believes" they're the only TEL producer and they expect TEL revenues to conclude in early 2020. Description of Work: Collage of PCFV map etc from United Nations website, made using Powerpoint and Paint. https://volcanoartprize.com/portfolio-item/is-2020-the-end-of-leaded-petrol/ [LID 19817]



And yes, like Mike, I have a major problem with people - like in Australian government publications - saying things like "residential lead paint was banned in Australia in 1970" when in truth, in 1970, we set our first limit as 10,000 ppm lead! In 1990, the limit was lowered to 5,000 ppm; in 1992, to 2,500 ppm; in 1997, to 1,000 ppm and due to a 2010 ban on adding any one of 15 lead compounds then used to make residential paint in Australia, the lead limit for residential paint was lowered to 90 ppm as of 1st October 2021!

In truth, each jurisdiction can only ban the addition of lead to something from a given date onwards, (and if you do that in stages it is correctly called a "phase-out" or "phase-down to a final ban"), whereas any consumer product that was made before that date, unless it is actually recalled, is still going to be kicking around in people's homes for as long as they don't know enough about the hazards of lead to dispose of it (or at least stop eating from it and put it on display only).

2023 Volcano Art Prize (VAP) Entry. Artist: Julia Jia, Age 9, School Name: Creative Einstein. Title: Spreadable Lead Sunset Clause. Lead-Safety Message: To protect our air, land, rivers and oceans from spreadable lead, the world needs to ban all leaded products that are easily dispersed. For example lead sinkers, ammunition, weights and old style lead acid batteries that leak. Description of Work: Colouring pencils on paper. https://volcanoartprize.com/portfolio-item/spreadable-lead-sunset-clause/ [LID 27686]



It does seem to me that if Eric Ritter is right in saying NOM-004 would "ban lead compounds as an ingredient in making, importing or selling glazed pottery, glazed ceramics and glassware, decorative and garden pieces included" and if there's going to be a date by which all glazes for these products that are sold, manufactured or imported into Mexico must have no lead compounds added, then, that constitutes a "ban on lead being added to Mexican pottery" so I would find "ban" an acceptable term here. Of course, this ban will not make Mexican pottery on that ban date "lead-free" because small operators may take years to use up the lead glazes they've already purchased, a black market could develop for such lead glazes if their promoters tell the buyers in pottery workshops that lead glazes are somehow better or at least cheaper than non-leaded glazes, most of the pottery made before the ban date will still have lead glazes and people may not necessarily be able to afford to replace it, and finally there can easily be lead found in the clay used to make the pottery. So I'd be happy that a "ban" means no lead added from a date to products made and preferably labelled "unleaded" after that date (so that when they're sold they are distinguishable from old stocks of leaded pottery), but it certainly will not mean leaded pottery won't be being used in Mexico and Mexican leaded pottery won't be being used worldwide from that date.

Thanks Mike for raising this important issue of nomenclature and hopefully we can all get on board with "ban" and "unleaded" and leave "lead free" out of it altogether.

***Email five** from **Mike Sharp**, Senior Safety Officer, Janus Corporation - hazardous material abatement and demolition; www.januscorp.com*

Elizabeth, I appreciate your statements on leadnet concerning Lead Free vs Free of Lead.

The Centers for Disease Control's reference level is called that because they do not want to imply that levels of lead in a child's blood below the reference level is a safe level. This was a problem when they called it a "level of concern." The CDC openly admits their reference level is not a Health Based Level - it is a statistics-based level - the highest 2.5% of blood lead levels in the children in the *NHANES* study tested.

From CDC's website: https://www.cdc.gov/lead-prevention/php/news-features/updates-blood-lead-reference-value.html which includes:

Overview

On October 28, 2021, CDC updated the blood lead reference value (BLRV) from 5.0 µg/dL to 3.5 µg/dL. A BLRV is intended to identify children with higher levels of lead in their blood compared with levels in most children.

The value is based on the 97.5th percentile of the blood lead distribution in U.S. children ages 1–5 years. Updating the BLRV to 3.5 µg/dL allows children within the range of 3.5–5 µg/dL to receive prompt actions. This helps mitigate health effects and remove or control exposure sources.

Updating the reference value encourages CDC, federal agencies, health departments, providers, communities, and other partners to take the following steps:

1. *Focus resources on children with the highest levels of lead in their blood compared with levels in most children in that age range*
2. *Identify and eliminate sources of lead exposure*
3. *Take more prompt actions to reduce the harmful effects of lead*

The BLRV is a population-based measurement. It now indicates that 2.5% of U.S. children aged 1–5 years have BLLs at or above 3.5 µg/dL. It is not a health-based standard or a toxicity threshold. The BLRV should be used to guide: to both determine recommended follow-up and prioritize communities with the need for exposure prevention.

It is good to know there are others in the world that see the difference between those trying to ensure products can be sold to the public (even if they contain lead), and the health of those using the products being sold.

I have a brother that used "Lead Free" solder in his plumbing career for over 20 years, in his 60s now he is paying for the exposures to lead (he thought he was safe from) in the way of just about every long-term lead symptom you can name (the heart related issues have had him in and out of the hospital several times in the past 5 or 6 years).

I use his story in sessions at the Lead and Healthy Housing Conferences (I am the President of LHHC) all the time.

As for my brother's issue - he worked with solder labeled "lead free" for 20 years.

"Lead Free" solder (and other construction products like vinyl) can be labeled "Lead Free" and contain as much as 2000 ppm lead.



2017 Volcano Art Prize (VAP) Entry. Artist: Geoff Walker. Title: Lead Soldered Yorkshire Fittings. Lead-Safety Message: Lemon Tree Passage Plumber Geoff Davey inspecting lead soldered 'Yorkshire' fittings at the local library March 2017. Description of Work: Photograph. https://volcanoartprize.com/portfolio-item/lead-soldered-yorkshire-fittings/ [LID 18389]

In my brother's case - he has had numerous symptoms that could have been caused by lead, but he never had his blood lead level taken until just a couple of years ago. It was at a 1.0 ug/dl - and the doctor told him he was lead-safe (implying that his symptoms could not be from lead exposure because his current blood lead level is only 1.0 ug/dl. Never mind that the lead could be in the organs, fatty tissue, or most likely bones at this time. Even if all the lead he was exposed to has been purged from his body naturally by now, the effects it has had on his body over the years could

still have caused the medical issues he has faced.

Personally, I believe if he were to have his femur x-rayed, it would show a significant amount of lead stored in his long bones - but that is my belief - there is not actual evidence at this point.

Keep up the good fight!

While I agree with both you and Tom Neltner we should be moving as close to zero as we can get - but we should not be claiming to achieve that impossible level.

***Email six** from **Barbara Miller**, Silver Valley Community Resource Center (SVCRC), also known as Silver Valley Action, Kellogg, Idaho, USA; www.silvervalleyaction.org ; https://www.facebook.com/people/Silver-Valley-Action/100068079602332/*

Hi Mike, Elizabeth,

Even with Tom Neltner's careful address regarding lead elimination [www.unleadedkids.org says “Unlead their play! Unlead their smiles! Unlead their minds! Unlead their lives because life is heavy enough without adding lead”], a ban would take decades to even address the lead health risk, exposures, cleanup and total removal!

I'm not sure how it is used with lead, but not to lighten the seriousness of riddance, modern day AI may be used to come up with a new creation?

My opinion! All People Run Better Unleaded