

# Where Communities and Organizations Meet: Applying Anthropology to Lead Education in Philadelphia

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## Executive Summary

Lead-based paint in Philadelphia's housing stock presents a major public health problem to city residents. Children are most susceptible to damage from lead poisoning, especially those who live in poorly maintained homes contaminated with lead-based paint. This report is the culmination of a two-month Applied Anthropology Internship at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Philadelphia.

Through qualitative methods that include participant observation and both individual and group semi-structured interviews, this research documents the nexus of lead-hazards. Three community organizations partially supported by the EPA are the focus of this study. They are Philadelphia Tenants' Action Group, Healthy Family Healthy Life, Inc., and HOPE Worldwide -- Philadelphia. The organizations target their services to low-income Philadelphia residents.

Findings indicate that approaches to increasing lead-hazard awareness are most successful when linked to other more pressing concerns identified by community members. "You can't take them what you want them to hear. You've got to listen to what else they're concerned about. That's why effective canvassing and community education is a slow-moving process," said one organizer. Flexibility is required in allocating money to community-based groups for lead-hazard education and reduction programs. Thus, if EPA is asking local communities to spread a particular message, the EPA should expect community groups to integrate the EPA message with larger, community-based concerns.

Compliance assistance and enforcement of the federal real estate disclosure regulations is a step closer to creating a safer environment for inner-city residents. Still, until a lead-free and/or lead-safe housing stock develops, the regulations may make renting a home more difficult for some Philadelphia residents with young children. Interviews with tenants and tenant advocates suggest that landlords are more reluctant than ever to rent to families with young children because of the likelihood the children will be exposed to lead-based paint. Under the federal disclosure rule, landlords must disclose to prospective new tenants information on children who had elevated blood lead levels (EBLs) as previous tenants of the pre-1978 unit for rent, *if the landlord has that information*. Remediation is not required under the federal rule, although the Philadelphia Health Department has authority, under local code, to order abatement. For numerous reasons, however, more than 10,000 children in Philadelphia have EBLs, and many more continue to be at risk.

The report concludes with recommendations for continuing EPA support of community-based organizations in their efforts to both increase awareness and decrease exposure sources of lead hazards in the city of Philadelphia. Continued support of all three organizations is highly recommended as one piece of a larger effort to prevent childhood lead poisoning in Philadelphia.

## Introduction

*"Lead is killing our kids. It's destroying them."*

*Southwest Philadelphia activist, July 1998*

While lead poisoning in Philadelphia rarely actually causes death, the pervasiveness of lead hazards in a city rich with old homes has contributed to the crisis of low-income inner-city neighborhoods. Childhood exposure to even small amounts of lead causes physical damage that can stunt the physical and mental development of its victims. Higher income residents also expose themselves and their children to lead-based paint hazards, especially through renovations of old homes, but those experiences are not part of this report. Lead-based paint is hazardous when ingested as dust, flakes or chips. Poorly maintained housing presents more of a hazard than well-maintained housing when lead-based paint is involved.

This report is the culmination of a two-month Applied Anthropology Internship at the Environmental Protection Agency Region 3 Lead Program in Philadelphia. Using a community-based approach, I documented the successes and barriers to success of EPA-backed lead hazard education programs in Philadelphia. In particular, the research focused on lead-based paint hazards and the relatively new federal disclosure regulation (Title X, Section 1018). The report offers recommendations for EPA action in the agency's continued community-based approach to lead hazard reduction in the city of Philadelphia and possible expansion of programs to other Region 3 locations.

Lead in Philadelphia is both a public health and a housing issue. Limited financial resources and poor housing conditions present major obstacles to residents and some landlords trying to keep homes lead-safe. Myriad social, political and economic factors feed Philadelphia's substandard housing conditions, the root of the city's lead-based paint problem. Public health services that address lead-based paint hazards work in the face of existing hazardous conditions, offering methods families can employ to reduce their children's risk of exposure. Housing-related solutions focus on abating unsafe environmental conditions. Also, because lead hazards often do not appear to parents to present an immediate threat, like other problems such as homelessness and hunger, effective lead-hazard education addresses other "wellness" and housing rights issues.

The urban environment is new terrain for the EPA. While the EPA has accepted brownfield sites and rivers as pieces of the urban landscape, the built environment, including housing, seems to be less integrated in EPA's concept of urban environmental issues. Deteriorated residential lead-based paint is a major source of lead hazards in the urban environment. The Centers for Disease Control called lead-based paint "the most common high-dose source of lead exposure for children". Congressional funding of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Lead-based Paint Hazard Reduction Program for 1998 totaled \$60 million, at the program level. Additionally, Congress recently funded a new Healthy Home Initiative to be initiated by HUD. In contrast, for example, congressional funding to the EPA Lead Program totaled only approximately \$14 million for state grants last year. While the congressional allocations to EPA and HUD for lead-hazard issues are much more complicated, this example illustrates that the housing department carries the weight of Congressional support for lead hazard reduction. With

the allocation of its resources in mind, the EPA should include healthy housing as part of its urban environment initiative.

In part, this report outlines the importance of housing issues in lead hazards. Healthy housing issues represent a vital element in the effectiveness of EPA's urban initiative and Lead Program.

## **Background**

### *Effects of Lead*

Children six years old and younger are most vulnerable to lead exposure. Even low levels of lead in young children can cause:

- Nervous system and kidney damage.
- Learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and decreased intelligence.
- Speech, language, and behavior problems.
- Poor muscle coordination.
- Decreased muscle and bone growth.
- Hearing damage.

For children, high levels of lead blood can result in seizures, unconsciousness and death.

High levels of lead in adults can cause:

- Increased chance of illness during pregnancy.
- Harm to a fetus, including brain damage or death.
- Fertility problems (in men and women).
- High blood pressure.
- Digestive problems.
- Nerve disorders.
- Memory and concentration problems.
- Muscle and joint pain.

Adults are much less susceptible to lead poisoning and this report focuses on preventing childhood lead exposure.

### *Philadelphia Housing and Lead Hazards*

Of the 29,065 children in Philadelphia tested for elevated blood lead levels (EBLs) between July 1994 and June 1995, 10,000 had levels exceeding 10 ug/dL. At this level, lead can cause decreased hearing, growth and learning abilities in some children. Aside from providing information to parents, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health does not intervene until a child's lead level reaches 20 ug/dL. When a child is found with levels exceeding 20 ug/dL in Philadelphia, Department's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program inspectors go to the home and identify sources of lead exposure. The

agency then sends a remediation orders to the landlord or property owner. In the first quarter of 1998, the Health Department required remediation of 6,523 premises in Philadelphia. Only 79 premises had actually come into compliance, for a backlog of 6,440 cases. When a child is severely lead poisoned, CLPPP crews complete "interim controls" in the house to temporarily contain the lead hazard. They typically complete three or four houses a month and bill landlords for the work. Those bills often go unpaid.

An estimated 500,000 units with lead based paint are located in Philadelphia. That is 74 percent of the nearly 675,000 units that existed in the city in 1990. Of those, 56,000 were vacant and 15,774 were boarded vacant units. Interviews I conducted during the summer of 1998 show clearly that people move into vacant buildings when they have no other housing options. Sometimes people actually claim rights to those vacant units and illegally collect rent from squatters. Also, renters living in residences where landlords are not licensed have less recourse to address poor management and maintenance than renters who are able to find and afford units managed by licensed landlords.

Where old housing is in disrepair and affordable, lead-safe housing is not available, the potential increases for children to ingest lead dust and lead-based paint chips. Ingesting only a few grains of lead dust a day can cause serious and lasting damage to a child. For example, a blood lead level of 10 ug/dL is equivalent of one grain of sugar dissolved in a bathtub of water.

## **Methodology**

This research depended on cooperation with three local organizations, partially funded through EPA grants to deal with lead hazard education. The organizations are: Tenants' Action Group (TAG), Healthy Family Healthy Life, Inc. and HOPE Worldwide Philadelphia. As an analysis of the intersection of lead-hazard programs in the city and the community those programs serve, this research assesses the effectiveness of outreach strategies employed by three EPA community partners, provides suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of targeted outreach and recommends methods for better understanding and strengthening the relationship between the EPA and its community partners.

New compliance assistance and enforcement efforts of the EPA to implement the federal Lead-based Paint Hazardous Reduction Act of 1992 (Title X) may result in increased awareness of lead hazards among tenants and landlords in Philadelphia. Therefore, it was also important to understand the enforcement process and how that process affects tenants, landlords and other community residents.

As the culmination of this summer project, I conducted group interviews with residents in high risk neighborhoods in Philadelphia to find out what people know about lead hazards and what obstacles to living in a lead-safe environment exist for residents.

### *Defining "community-based"*

My research did not uncover a clear EPA definition of "community-based". In its suggestions that solutions for some environmental problems may come from geographically diffuse local areas, the Agency implies that "community-based" refers to a specific locality. Activists refine the definition of

"community-based". One community organizer defined community-based groups as those groups comprised of people who live in the same neighborhood where they are socially active. For the purposes of this paper, community-based is an adjective that describes a geographic area and organizational structure that both is located where a targeted population lives or receives services and runs on the decisions and actions of that targeted population.

### *Techniques*

The research techniques used to gather qualitative data included participant observation, semi-structured individual interviews and, at the end of this internship, group interviews. More than 20 hours of participant observation included canvassing neighborhoods with TAG staff, attending educational performances, observing waiting room dynamics and accompanying federal and city employees on tours and inspections of lead-laden residences. Group interview questions evolved from an analysis of 14 semi-structured interviews conducted early in the internship with people working to reduce lead hazards in Philadelphia. Attending meetings of organizations involved in reducing lead-hazards was also part of this process. Informal interviews with TAG, Healthy Family and HOPE volunteers, employees and targeted participants during these activities built the foundation for questions asked during group interviews with Philadelphia residents.

Three African American women participated in the first group interview. Two were canvassers for TAG, and all were mothers of lead poisoned children. The interview was held in north Philadelphia, near where the participants lived. The second group interview was composed of seven African American women who lived in southwest Philadelphia near where the interview took place. Those women were a mix of mothers, grandmothers and aunts, some living with lead-poisoned children.

## **The Organizations**

This section briefly describes the three EPA Lead Program partners of interest and discusses some of their successes and some obstacles to success that the organizations appear to face. It is difficult to quantify organizations' success in reducing lead hazards and increasing awareness because numerous spurious factors can result in reduced lead hazards and increased awareness. This research analyzes the interface of community-based organizations and the served community. As such, success is measured by an organization's connection with the community. By "connection" I mean that community members must find the organization both useful and responsive. A strong connection is the cornerstone for any successful education campaign. "You can't take them what you want them to hear. You've got to listen to what else they're concerned about. That's why effective canvassing and community education is a slow moving process," said one Philadelphia-based organizer. Community-based environmental education requires patient integration of messages and a dialog among stakeholder groups (community members, the EPA and community-based organizations and their consumers). Organizations such as the EPA and their community partners need the cooperation of their target audiences to conduct effective public health and environmental education. Community members (or target audiences) will ignore and otherwise resist messages from organizations that they perceive as useless and unresponsive.

Based on their quarterly reports and interviews with community members who have come into contact with the target organizations and based on my own observations, all three of the organizations provide useful and effective services. I highly recommend continued EPA support to each of them.

### *Tenants' Action Group (TAG)*

TAG, a tenants' advocacy group, has been located in center city Philadelphia for 25 years. The organization's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program developed in 1991. It offers assistance to families trying to relocate from lead contaminated homes anywhere in the city when one or more children in the household suffers from lead poisoning. The organization has developed a database of 532 cases in the past two years which has served to identify hazardous rental units and landlords who fail to comply with federal and municipal disclosure regulations. As part of an EPA grant, TAG also hired between 4 to 12 canvassers to conduct door-to-door outreach in targeted neighborhoods in south and north Philadelphia. All except one of the current canvassers are mothers of lead poisoned children.

### *HOPE Worldwide -- Philadelphia*

HOPE is a non-profit charitable organization, targeting north Philadelphia in its outreach efforts. Its Lead Outreach Program incorporates the following three projects:

- HOPE Clinic -- a medical clinic in north Philadelphia.
- HOPE for Kids -- an immunization campaign that incorporates canvassing with follow-up contact and local health fairs. The campaign expanded to include lead poisoning this year.
- Story Tree Gang -- a troupe of teenagers and young adults who use puppetry, music and storytelling as a means of educating children about "wellness" issues such as lead poisoning, immunization, nutrition, drug and alcohol use, abstinence and conflict resolution.

### *Healthy Family Healthy Life, Inc.*

Healthy Family is a community-based non-profit organization established eight years ago. It provides advocacy, outreach, education and some casework to the under-served populations in southwest Philadelphia through canvassing, workshops and collaborating with other community-based organizations in the area. The organization focuses on environmental, health and general "wellness" issues and concentrates its efforts in the Paschall-Kingsessing area of southwest Philadelphia, where the organization leaders live.

*Paschall-Kingsessing* combines two neighborhoods in southwest Philadelphia and includes much of two zip code areas where some of the highest rates of lead poisoning in Philadelphia exist. In one zip code, 30 to 40 percent of the children tested for lead poisoning had a blood lead level greater than 10 ug/dL. In the other, more than 40 percent of the tested children had that level of lead poisoning, according to

Department of Public Health figures. Predictive indicators for lead poisoning include poverty, race and age. As such, poverty likely contributes to the high levels of lead poisoning in Paschall-Kingsessing's children. Nearly six percent of the neighborhood population lives below the poverty level. Median income for families in Paschall-Kingsessing was \$23,199, and per capita income was \$8,045, according to the 1990 Census. These figures are the lowest in all the neighborhoods in south and southwest Philadelphia. The area also faces environmental hazards from nearby industry. The racial and ethnic distribution is 81 percent African American, 16 percent white, two percent Asian and one percent from other unidentified groups.

### *Successes and Obstacles*

#### *TAG*

Without recounting the many successes listed in TAG's grant file updates, additional **successes** include:

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- *Serving as a resource for employees* who are themselves members of lead contaminated neighborhoods. TAG employees work in an environment of advocacy, where they have ready access to information about rights issues from housing to health care.
- *Developing legitimacy* in target communities by using employees with their own lead-hazard experiences to conduct lead-hazard outreach.
- *Developing good name recognition* throughout the city in the served community.
- *Creating a casework database* of lead contaminated housing that has proven a valuable resource to EPA enforcement.

TAG's Lead Program Coordinator left the project, and an interim coordinator was in place during the time of this research. Also, the Organizing Director was relatively new to the position. This transition period should be considered when reviewing some of the **obstacles** the organization faces. They include:

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- *Inefficient Telephone System* -- Two operators overloaded with calls also receive clients in the front waiting area. A recording sometimes gives callers the option to dial their party's extension. But other times, beleaguered operators have to take the call or the system simply shuts down.
- *Language barriers* -- Many of TAG's clients poorly understand and speak English. The organization and its clients would benefit from more and varied bilingual employees for on-site translation.
- *Stable funding sources and staff* -- Financial instability and staff turnover were problems that disrupted TAG's outreach efforts and its relationships with other lead-hazard organizations this summer.
- *Support group* -- As TAG staff enter information about new clients into the Lead Program database, they ask the client to join a support group. Generally the client is calling for help relocating from a lead contaminated home or getting back into an apartment from which they were illegally evicted. There has been very little interest in the support group yet people agree to receive information, suggesting that the question posed at the intake call is inappropriate and ineffective.
- *Canvassing* is one of the main activities TAG accomplished with EPA funding. However, there are

a number of problems with the operation identified by canvassers and administrative staff, including:

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- *Goal for number of people to be reached was too high.* The canvassers, who are knowledgeable women with their own lead experiences to share, did not have time to spend discussing lead hazards and prevention measures with people at their doors. Instead they often rushed off to the next house in order to meet the outreach goal.
- *Inaccurate information.* Canvassers said people inaccurately completed the brief survey they carried with them because the survey participants did not want to reveal certain information to strangers.
- *No identification.* Accompanied occasionally by a husband or child, four or five women, with clipboards and packets of information walked city blocks in neighborhoods wary of intrusions. They would probably gain more access by wearing TAG t-shirts or badges to identify themselves to residents.

## HOPE

Without recounting the many successes described in HOPE's quarterly reports, the following are some of the organization's additional **successes**:

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- *Developing good name recognition* and a positive image in its targeted community of upper and lower north Philadelphia.
- *Developing a consistent, recognizable and numerous population of volunteer canvassers.* HOPE's volunteer canvassers participate in a training session and conduct follow-up appointments with families after outreach.
- *Developing an organizational structure* that would transfer Lead Program activities to any of the 61 cities in the country where HOPE is already established.
- *Building coalitions with other community groups.* HOPE is able to identify partners and enlist the support of community resources, such as health care providers who will see children despite their ability to pay. HOPE also has the organizational resources to that could develop networks of groups throughout the city and facilitate grant-writing and other capacity-building projects.
- *Supporting the Story Tree Gang.* HOPE's troupe of high school students use skits, puppetry, music and dance to relay messages about health and "wellness" issues, such as conflict resolution, immunization, nutrition and lead poisoning. They perform mostly in north Philadelphia, but are expanding their presence to other parts of the city, including southwest Philadelphia at the invitation of Healthy Family Healthy Life, Inc.

One **obstacle** the organization faces in successfully educating residents about lead hazards and prevention techniques is the Story Tree Gang's "Evil Lead Man" skit. While the skit is educational and entertaining, it emphasizes conscious ingestion of paint chips that look like candy. However, children are commonly poisoned by lead when they unconsciously ingest lead dust in daily hand-to-mouth activity and by biting painted window sills. Still, it is an entertaining skit and does clearly convey the message that lead-based paint is hazardous.

## *Healthy Family*

Without recounting the many successes listed in Healthy Family's quarterly reports, additional successes include:

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- *Developing and maintaining a collaboration* with the existing community-based organizations in the area.
- *Developing a positive image* and good name recognition among area residents.
- *Identifying and assessing community needs* effectively and establishing trust among residents. This is largely a result of Health Family's leaders living in the community and conducting outreach that allows residents to voice concerns as well as receive information.
- *Conducting activities with relatively little funding.*

Some **obstacles** Healthy Family faces include:

- Expectations of funding agencies -- The organization is small, community-based and advocacy oriented. It is good at what it does, but sometimes written documentation to funding agencies does not meet expectations of funding agencies. For instance, the documentation is late or uses colloquial language. A grant recently allowed Healthy Family to purchase a computer and printer, so as organization members become comfortable with this new technology, the documentation produced will likely improve. This obstacle only reflects a prejudice inherent in bureaucratic organization. It does not reflect the effectiveness of the community organization. This obstacle becomes a real problem when agencies reduce funding to organizations like Healthy Family based on the interface between community-based organization and funding agency, as opposed to the interface of community-based organization and community.
- *Few formal resources* -- Healthy Family Healthy Life Inc. and other community-based organizations in southwest Philadelphia draw from relatively few existing formal service providers in the area. There are no hospitals, and the Mayor's Office of Community Service does not have a southwest Philadelphia location. Because of a limited number of social services in southwest Philadelphia, Healthy Family often provides casework for clients. However, that stretches the limits of an already strapped local organization.

## *The Partners Together*

With Region 3 facilitation, the community partners have become more aware of each other and have begun to use each other as resources. Community-based organizers noted the usefulness of networking with each other in particular ways. For example, during the summer of my research, HOPE's Story Tree Gang performed in Southwest Philadelphia at Healthy Family gathering, and TAG canvassers began a dialog with HOPE's Lead Program executive director concerning effective outreach efforts and successful grant-writing. The organizations can benefit from each other's strengths.

### *The Federal Government*

The EPA continues to be perceived as the supplier of pamphlets and as a regulatory agency, distanced from neighborhoods. This perception of the EPA would make effective outreach unlikely without the intervention of community partners such as TAG, HOPE, Healthy Family and the City of Philadelphia's CLPPP. Outreach should continue through community-based groups that people view as proactive, responsive and helpful.

## **Findings**

*"You can't take (residents) what you want them to hear. You've got to listen to what else they're concerned about. That's why effective canvassing and community education*

*is a slow moving process."*

*Southwest Philadelphia community activist, July 1998.*

The Region 3 Lead Program's position as part of a regulatory agency and its current organizational structure and staffing are not conducive to community-based environmental protection. The agency, however, has developed community partners with strong ties to the served community. This is an important interface for the EPA. Not only is the relationship between the Lead Program and its **community partners** a resource for partners, it is **a valuable resource to the EPA program.**

Through its community partners, the Lead Program can develop more relevant and effective policy implementation strategies. Ideally, partners would participate in the development of policy as well. This cooperation between community and regulatory agency contributes to compliance.

It is essential that this local-based environmental protection does not lead to decreased obligations at the federal level. Community organizations will provide a vital link between target populations and the EPA, but cannot be expected to stretch their limited resources further. "The agencies can't go away and leave this on the back of the local organizations. It won't work," said one community activist.

### *Group Interviews*

In the first group interview, dominated by TAG canvassers, the conversation focused on effective lead-hazard and prevention education techniques, while most of the women in the second interview had very limited knowledge of lead poisoning. In the second interview, only two of the women had children with elevated blood-lead levels. Others did not know whether their children "had lead", but decided to get them tested. Generational differences emerged in the participants' discussion of cleaning methods and housing conditions. The conversation shifted toward housing and landlord problems. Prevention,

obstacles to prevention, symptoms and effects of lead poisoning initiated the discussion.

The group interviews not only provided information about the participants' housing and lead hazard experiences, but also served as a forum for community members to educate each other on lead hazards and poisoning prevention measures. These measures included exchanging recipes for meals that fight lead in the body and methods for making their homes lead safe. The experience-sharing structure of the group interview was vital to both garnering honest information and to the participants receptiveness of information and unsolicited determination to have untested children screened for lead poisoning. It also became clear through this experience sharing format, that the TAG canvassers are an underutilized resource. These mothers are articulate and active women who want to share their knowledge and experiences about dealing with lead poisoned children and living in lead contaminated homes.

### *Immediate Needs*

*"There's a whole lot of important things, and (lead) is one of them."*

*Southwest Philadelphia parent, August 1998*

The interview participants made clear that lead hazards were one of many concerns in their environment. Analysis shows the immediacy of other problems generally takes priority over creating a lead-safe environment. Women who participated in the interviews had dealt with various hardships in their lives. One woman had been homeless as a single parent and believed her son got lead poisoning initially from the abandoned house where they lived. Another woman had kicked a drug addiction two years ago and was hoping to have her children returned to her soon. Generally, the participants either were currently or had been renting inadequate housing. One woman spoke of her heater spitting fireballs into the kitchen. Another fell through the rusting heating vents in her floor. Another woman said her landlord split an old home into apartments in such a way that the second floor residents had to tramp through her apartment to enter their home. She decided to move into an equally dilapidated home which at least offered her and her family more privacy. Others spoke of leaking and sagging ceilings, roach and termite infestations, and holes in the floors, walls and ceilings of their homes.

There did seem to be a generational difference between housing conditions people had experienced. Women over 50 years old who were grandmothers were shocked by the housing conditions younger women endured.

Effective lead-hazard education addresses ""wellness"" and housing rights issues in addition to lead-based paint information. To be effective, lead hazard awareness and prevention planning must recognize that the immediacy of other problems sometimes outweighs the threat of lead poisoning.

### *Disclosure Regulations*

*"Landlords don't really want to disclose that their properties have lead because they don't want the lawsuits."*

*Tenant Action Group canvasser and parent of lead poisoned child, August 1998*

Federal and city regulations mandate that Philadelphia landlords inform their tenants of any known lead hazards in their rental units. The city's regulations provide modest enforcement measures, and the EPA levied the first fines under the Title X regulation in July 1998. These regulations begin to address concerns that residents have about their housing conditions. However, they fall extremely short of requiring abatement or even interim controls that would make a home lead safe. In fact, this changing regulatory environment may be increasing the difficulty people with children have renting a place to live.

"I wanted to rent a property from this lady on 17th and Diamond, and she asked me how old was my children, and I told her I had a five-year-old, and she was like, 'well, I can't rent that property because it has lead in it.' She didn't want to do the work or whatever like that there, and lead is a major thing with children....you know. It made me feel like, dag, I need this house so bad. But because she turned me down because I had (children). You know I even tried to cover it up by (saying), 'my son only come on the weekends.' But it didn't work because I had already done spoke on it. But maybe it was for the best too."

The women who participated in the interviews said this was a common scenario. According to interview participants, landlords are fully aware of their legal obligations. Enforcement of the lead disclosure regulation may encourage landlords to make their rental housing lead safe through inexpensive interim control measures like painting over lead-based painted surfaces. However, several tenant advocates and CLPPP staff argue that it is unlikely that landlords with numerous other housing code violations would comply.

Community activists and city agents said many non-compliant landlords are long-time family friends or relatives of their tenants. One community organization refers to them as "rental property owners" instead of the largely derogatory term "landlords". These rental property owners consider themselves to be doing a favor for their family member or friend by letting families live in their lead contaminated homes.

None of the interview participants were actually renting from a long-time family friend or relative. Some had lived with their parents for a while, but most of their experiences were with landlords whose only connection to them was through their housing. The interview participants considered having a family member or friend as a landlord to be a less than ideal, but very common, occurrence. Participant observation also supported this. They agreed that lower rent was a possible advantage, sometimes. "But then because they family, you can wait to seal the leak or you can wait [for] this because you're family. Right....but they want their money on time," said one participant.

### *Symptoms and Effects*

Aside from the two TAG canvassers who participated in an interview, participants displayed little knowledge about the physical damage lead poisoning causes. Some participants knew generally that lead affects mental and physical development. Women with lead poisoned children said either their children displayed no symptoms, were hyperactive or lethargic, or had aching joints.

Ritelin, a medication that is supposed to calm hyperactive children was prescribed for one participant's lead poisoned children. Several community activists and parents suggested that lead poisoned children are often misdiagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder and are prescribed what they consider to be an addictive and debilitating drug.

### *Prevention*

Following is a list of the prevention techniques interview participants employed in their attempts to provide a lead-safe environment for their children. Many of their cleaning techniques reduce dust in the air and were employed mainly to make the home environment comfortable for people with asthma, a common affliction among interview participants and their family members. Also, it was clear that women with lead poisoned children were more aware of prevention techniques such as nutrition and starting with cold water to cook. Information from health care providers and the city's public health outreach workers was an effective way to reach families with lead poisoned children. The key, however, is to prevent children from being poisoned in the first place.

- Leave house -- While relocation was the most sought after and employed technique, the lack of lead-safe affordable housing in Philadelphia made relocation to lead-safe housing difficult. Often families relocated to equally lead contaminated homes.
- Sweeping and vacuum cleaners -- In the absence of a vacuum cleaner, some participants swept their rugs and carpeting with a damp broom. Damp sweeping is what the participants referred to as an old-fashioned method of cleaning. Some women owned Rainbow vacuum cleaners which they said catches the dust in a water reservoir instead of blowing tiny particles into the air as conventional vacuum cleaners. The people who owned these vacuum cleaners said they cost about \$1,200, a prohibitive price for many. Several women used regular vacuum cleaners which pick up dirt from carpets and rugs, catches much of the dirt in a bag and then releases the smallest particles back into the air. Lead dust is small enough to slip through the vacuum cleaner.
- Let cold water run -- Interview participants said they knew this was useful in flushing water systems of various pollutants. However, it is unclear as to how many people actually employ this technique every day.
- Shoes off at door -- Participants said they encouraged children to remove their shoes as they entered the house to keep outside dirt from entering the house. Lead hazards are not a primary concern, but are reduced through this technique.
- Nutrition -- The interview participants were generally interested in nutritious meal ideas. The women with lead poisoned children consciously used nutrition to reduce their children's lead levels.
- Boiling water -- One woman boiled water to reduce lead hazards when mixing baby formula. This technique is actually more damaging because it concentrates lead as the water evaporates.

### *Obstacles*

Interview participants cited a number of obstacles low-income Philadelphia parents face to living in lead-safe environments. Through participant observation, I identified others. Combined, they include:

- Landlords who simply do not maintain their properties.

- Relatively little public awareness about the problem because lead has been considered mainly a "poor people's problem".
- Difficulty in keeping children off of lead painted window sills and porches and out of dirt and other possible contaminants.
- Ineffective and insulting demonstrations. Participants complained that at times, lead educators speak patronizingly to their audience who in turn lose interest in the subject. Using the word "clean" in outreach may be misleading to people who vacuum daily and referring to "landlords" may exclude relatives to rent housing to their kin. The participants also said that demonstrations should be made with the cheapest item available so that audience members will easily recognize the tools they need for lead-safe cleaning.
- A lack of funding to abate homes with lead paint. The participants argued that removing lead was the best solution to the city's lead hazard problem.
- One woman suggested that all lead plumbing in the city should be replaced.

## Recommendations

Community based work has been the focus of this research and most of the following recommendations address how the EPA might improve its community-based efforts.

### *Financial support:*

It is my understanding that the United States Congress has failed to fund the EPA's lead program for outreach, instead opting to fund HUD to a greater degree. However, the EPA's Regional Offices structure puts it in closer proximity to the cities dealing with lead-based paint hazards.

Region 3 Lead Program has indicated to its Philadelphia partners that continued funding of their programs from Region 3 is unlikely because (1) fewer funds are anticipated to be available directly to the Regional Program for community-based organizations and (2) new funding is needed for other highly impacted cities in the Region. However, it is important to Philadelphia community partners that they continue a relationship with the EPA. In particular, association with the EPA adds credibility to community-based organizations in their efforts to garner financial support from other sources.

Brief "concept" papers are maintained in the Regional Office to offer as project ideas for unexpected and short-lived funding opportunities. Community partners are asked to contribute to that stock. The three community partners studied most closely during this project are committed to work in the city of Philadelphia and are supported (in varying degrees) by other funding sources. They will continue their work despite the removal of EPA funds. However, these groups would be able to effectively spend small amounts of unexpected funding relatively quickly, so would benefit from occasional, one-time funding offers.

### *Strengthen HUD, CDC and EPA cooperation:*

Contaminated and poorly maintained housing is a major source of lead poisoning in the city of Philadelphia. One partner suggested that lead poisoning is seen as a local issue. Because HUD is funded to a greater degree than the EPA, Region 3's Lead Program should create more avenues for filtering some HUD money to the locally based EPA office.

I suggest the Region 3 Lead Program should try to acquire an additional staff member (either funded through a HUD grant or employed by HUD) to deal with the local housing issues involved in lead hazard reduction. A Center for Disease Control employee works at the city health department with the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program. Perhaps EPA location of a HUD employee could be similarly structured.

The EPA should consider working more closely with both HUD and CDC to increase coordination of their approaches and resources for lead hazard reduction and poisoning prevention. All three organizations should continue to support existing community-based organizations in their lead campaigns. Such local-level organizations are key resources for discovering community problems and solutions.

The additional inter-agency interaction might also encourage the Philadelphia Public Housing Authority (PHA) to address any lead hazards existing in their properties. Many residents argued that PHA's scattered-site units were contaminated with lead-based paint and were poorly maintained. HUD has agreed with EPA to take the lead in enforcing disclosure regulations in public housing. Whereas the federal lead disclosure law does not require abatement, I suggest it may be worthwhile to find out, through the Philadelphia CLPPP, the incidences of EBLs in children living in PHA properties and to work with HUD to follow-up as appropriate.

*In-kind support to community partners:*

Philadelphia community partners would benefit from EPA in-kind support, which could simply be absorbed by the Region 3 office. For example, the costs of copying announcements, flyers and other literature created by the partners often eats significant portions of small budgets. While this option may currently be available to community partners they seem to be unaware of it. In-kind support could also include sharing staff expertise. The EPA could create a "skills bank" that identified the skills and interests of Lead Program staff and offer paid hours for that staff to work with community partners. For example, if a Spanish-speaking staff member interested in helping to interpret a few hours a week, the EPA could relinquish and continue to pay that staff member for a few hours. Other ideas should come from community partners.

*EPA employees who chose to participate in such a "skills bank" should first participate in training that addresses cultural differences (reflected in race, ethnicity and socioeconomic backgrounds) between themselves and the served community. Cultural diversity training was required in certain divisions in 1997; I recommend that follow-up training be provided. Employees who work together should not attend this training together to ensure honest interaction in the workshop and to ensure that the friendships and polite interaction among co-workers is not damaged by frank discussion of sensitive topics. Extreme care should be taken in choosing an appropriate workshop or series of workshops for this type of training. This type of awareness would be valuable for anyone in the EPA office who interacts with Philadelphia residents on a regular basis.*

### *Radio spot competition:*

The Region has recently developed radio public service announcements (PSAs) using EPA staff. This begins to address residents' concern that lead hazards are not publicized through the media. However, the EPA could strengthen community awareness by sponsoring a radio announcement competition at local junior high and high schools such as the one outlined below. Region 3 could utilize existing community ties developed through its summertime environmental education program for 7th graders and the ties that community partners have developed with resident youth. Not only would this develop PSAs for the general dissemination of information, but the process of creating announcements would increase public awareness as students practice their announcements at home and school and learn about lead hazards and prevention to develop a technically accurate announcement.

The announcement must effectively transfer accurate lead hazard information to a targeted audience. Students could use existing EPA outreach staff for gathering technical information and their own creativity and community-based experiences to make the announcement relevant. They could submit simple tape recordings and typed transcripts of their ideas and first place winners would work with EPA communications staff to professionally record the announcement and air it on local radio stations as a public service announcement. The competition could offer substantial monetary prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd places and would be judged by EPA staff, students, and several EPA community partners. The amount of monetary prizes should be discussed with community partners and should be large enough to make the time involved in developing their entries worthwhile. Suggested prize amounts are 1st prize - \$500, 2nd - \$200, 3rd - \$50.

### *Technical support to community partners:*

Partners would benefit from the power to suggest additional studies that address questions they have about unexamined exposure to lead and "folk" prevention techniques, such as:

- Can lead be transferred through eating vegetables grown in tainted soil?
- How effective are Rainbow vacuum cleaners and damp sweeping?
- What are some additional effects of nutrition on lead absorption in the body?

EPA's telephone hotline is available to the general public, but community partners need technical information that is not so readily available from the hotline. If answers to these questions are not currently available to the EPA, perhaps the agency could initiate some research that begins to address them. This is one example of how the community can help "define" the problems the EPA addresses and help shape the research that EPA conducts.

Community partners might also benefit from access to EPA databases, especially information that might help them generate support.

### *Workshops:*

Mothers of lead poisoned children who started canvassing with TAG suggested that holding workshops regularly in a place that is easily accessible and familiar to city residents would more effectively spread awareness about lead hazards and prevention techniques. These workshops would present, in small settings, information on 1) how to use nutrition to reduce lead absorption in the body, 2) cleaning techniques that are specific to lead, including information on cleaning products they can afford and 3) ideas for dealing with behaviors exhibited by lead-poisoned children. They would also offer on-site blood lead testing for children.

As a consistent weekly or monthly presence, word would spread about the workshops. "We could reach a whole lot of people. Then this person would tell that person and explain." Another participant agreed, "Someone always going back sharing information, even if it's positive or negative, somebody always going back to tell." If they found information useful, workshop participants would convey that information to people in their social networks. So the education continues outside of the workshop. Also, the "experience-sharing" format would provide continued insights to workshop facilitators about people's experiences with lead hazards.

In light of the myriad other issues in people's lives, it is important to make the workshops worth the time and bus token investment. Simply receiving information is not enough to attract participants who have had no experience with lead poisoning. "You have to make sure there is something there that is not boring these people to death, that is actually capturing their interest," said one TAG canvasser and parent of a lead poisoned child.

A scaled-down version of the workshop would consist of one or two staff members each week offering information, demonstrations and, at the end, providing workshop participants with tools such as soaps, sponges, mops, bucket and towelettes. Pocketbook-size Wet Ones packages are especially handy for mothers who want to keep their children's hands clean when away from soap and water. "It's not that you have to buy them (the participants) or anything like that, but there's more interest when you know you're gonna get something at the end of the night, after you sit in a meeting for an hour," one woman said.

It is also important to distinguish between cleaning and keeping a home lead safe. The word "clean" is very subjective, and people become defensive about outsiders asking whether they know how to "clean" their home. Rightly so. There is a difference between having a clean home and having a lead-safe home. For example, frequent vacuuming can spread lead dust but makes a home clean. Be careful using the word clean when talking about people's homes.

The TAG canvassers whose children were lead poisoned suggest sharing experiences about cleaning methods and nutrition and caring for a hyperactive child. They suggested that people would be more receptive to learning when information is transferred as an experience and not as a mandate. "Don't tell them the *have* to do this. No. If you tell them they have to do it, it's not going to work. You just tell them about your hopes and your experiences," said a mother of lead poisoned children.

### *Sharing publicity:*

When the EPA issues a press release, it should consider how community partners contributed to EPA success and include that information, with the partners approval. For example, recently the EPA had a chance to publicize TAG's role in identifying non-compliant landlords, as the office issued a press release

on enforcement measures. Through its casework, TAG feeds the names of non-compliant landlords to the EPA. Sharing publicity for the recent success both acknowledges the partner's contribution and value to the EPA and saves the partner time in developing and issuing its own release.

### *Replacement windows:*

The Region 3 Program is considering creating a Supplementary Environmental Project that would replace windows covered in lead-based paint. This would eliminate source of lead poisoning in many homes. Any offer of off-the-shelf items should be made available to poor landlords who might not otherwise eligibility requirements for federal funds.

## **Why Anthropology?**

Anthropologists can provide a critical perspective for community-based environmental protection by 1) acting as cultural interpreters, 2) helping the EPA define problems in collaboration with communities, 3) broadening the EPA structure and 4) discovering insights that are out of the grasp of quantitative research methods.

1) Anthropologists are trained to facilitate cross-cultural understanding across, not just ethnic, racial and socio/economic differences, but also across organizational barriers. The EPA staff and bureaucratic structure and mind set, which is a product of the agency's organization, differs greatly from the organizational structure of the community groups they fund, such as the family and neighborhood-based structure of Healthy Family, Healthy Life. As an anthropologist working for the EPA, it was also my job to question the culture of the EPA, not just the culture of their community partners and the "target" community. Because the EPA controls some funding of these partners, analysis of both groups is key to effective interaction.

2) Through interactive, qualitative research methods, anthropologists can define problems in concert with the targeted community. The importance of such collaboration has been elaborated earlier in this report, but I will reiterate that community members must find the services of the EPA and other agencies useful or they will likely ignore or resist those services and educational messages. In fact, the EPA may find additional and more pressing concerns defined by community residents.

3) Anthropological research methods broaden the EPA's structure. The way the EPA currently structures the daily lives of its employees inhibits flexibility of place and time, which is essential to effective interviewing and participant observation.

4) Anthropologists can discover insights that are out of the grasp of quantitative research methods. Because the systems that people operate in seem normal to them, quantitative survey research is an *ineffective* approach to ascertaining certain kinds of information. For example, by sitting in the TAG reception area and by calling their offices often, I identified something as simple as an inefficient telephone/voice mail system that was increasing the burden employees working as receptionists and telephone operators. Also, only through the group interviews did I recognize how offensive the term "clean" is in lead education literature. Only through conversations and participant observation with the

TAG canvassers, did I see how well those women understand lead hazards in the home and children who "have lead". It is unlikely that researchers using quantitative methods, such as formal surveys, would have gotten this data because such surveys and other quantitative methods confine the social science investigation to what the researcher already assumes. In other words, answers to survey questions are restricted by the question itself.

The methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviewing and then performing an analysis of observation notes and transcribed interviews allow anthropologists to gather rich and nuanced data.

## **Conclusion**

This report provides a first step in contextualizing lead hazards in Philadelphia housing. Using participant observation and interviewing techniques, this qualitative research approach highlights experiences that are ill-suited for investigation with quantitative measures. For instance, the "success" of lead-hazard awareness campaigns cannot be measured by counting the change in lead levels among Philadelphia children. This would ignore the obstacles that confront even informed parents. Lead levels, if they are successfully measured, are likely to be affected more by the demolition of lead-contaminated homes and the construction of lead-free housing.

In the meantime, cooperation between the EPA and its community partners can facilitate interim safety measures such as education about lead hazards and prevention techniques, especially when those partners are responsive, useful and truly community-based. This cooperation is vital to both partners and the EPA. While the community-based organizations have themselves initiated partnerships with business and outside funding agents, it is essential that local-based environmental protection does not lead to decreased obligations at the federal level. Community organizations will provide a vital link between target populations and the EPA, but cannot be expected to stretch their limited resources further. "The agencies can't go away and leave this on the back of the local organizations. It won't work," said one community activist.

## **Appendix I**

Following are changes implemented by TAG and HOPE since the time of this research:

### **TAG**

1. With EPA grant money, TAG will support two part-time employees to develop and conduct workshops concerning lead hazards.
2. A permanent Lead Program coordinator has been hired.

## HOPE

1. The Lead Skit in the Story Tree Gang performances is being retooled to put more emphasis on hand washing to remove invisible lead dust.
  2. The organization's National Chairman is meeting in Washington D.C. to initiate in other cities the Lead Program that has been so successful in Philadelphia.
  3. An additional staff member for the Philadelphia Lead Program has been hired through the AmeriCorps program.
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