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EPA: Violation Of Airborne Lead Standards At Two California Airports Agency Continues To Delay Action On Toxic Effects Of Lead In Aviation Fuel

Findings reinforce need for immediate EPA action to phase out lead in aviation fuel, the leading cause of airborne lead emissions in the U.S.

June 19, 2013

Washington, D.C. —

Findings reinforce need for immediate EPA action to phase out lead in aviation fuel, the leading cause of airborne lead emissions in the U.S.

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June 19, 2013

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the results of lead monitoring conducted at 17 general aviation airports around the country. EPA's findings from the 17 airports indicate that two airports in California, McClellan-Palomar Airport in San Diego County and San Carlos Airport in San Mateo County, exceed the air quality standards set by EPA for lead. A third airport in California, Palo Alto Airport which is approximately 10 miles from San Carlos, was only slightly below the legal threshold for airborne lead emissions.

Even at low doses, lead is highly toxic and causes a variety of adverse health effects. Children are at higher risk than adults because they absorb larger amounts of lead and are more sensitive to lead induced toxicity. In its description of the findings at San Carlos Airport, EPA states: "Infants and young children are especially sensitive to even low levels of lead, which may contribute to behavioral and learning problems and lower IQ." Both violating airports have an elementary school located approximately one half-mile away: Carlsbad's Jefferson Elementary in San Diego County and Laureola Elementary in San Mateo



San Carlos Airport, in California's San Mateo County, and surrounding neighborhoods. Aviation is the single largest source of lead emissions in the U.S. and poses a significant threat to public health. (Gunther Hagleitner)

County.

“These findings, coupled with EPA’s repeated conclusion that lead is extremely toxic to humans, wildlife and the environment and causes health effects even at low doses, indicate that EPA should take action now to protect public health,” said Marcie Keever, legal director for Friends of the Earth. “The EPA’s continuing failure to do what the law requires and address this pollution is especially frustrating when steps can be taken today to provide alternative unleaded aviation fuel at airports around the country. The health of airport workers, pilots, passengers, and surrounding communities from ongoing exposure to leaded aviation gasoline continues to hang in the balance.”

Aviation is the single largest source of lead emissions in the U.S. and poses a significant threat to public health. “EPA needs to stop excusing the largest source of airborne lead emissions from regulation. Taking all of the evidence together, we must address this critical health issue and start phasing out lead in aviation gas now,” said Deborah Behles, Associate Professor and Staff Attorney at the Environmental Law & Justice Clinic at Golden Gate University School of Law.

Friends of the Earth, represented by Earthjustice and the Environmental Law & Justice Clinic at Golden Gate University School of Law, has been working to pressure EPA to regulate lead in aviation fuel since 2003. In 2010 the EPA acknowledged that adverse health problems are likely caused by lead in aviation fuel, but the EPA has not yet acted to start reducing these risks. The EPA found that communities living near airports; children attending school near airports; and pilots, student-trainees, and passengers are all potentially exposed to lead emissions from piston engine aircraft that use leaded aviation fuel. Friends of the Earth sued EPA in 2012 for failure to respond to its continued requests for regulation of leaded aviation fuel.

“The Clean Air Act does not require the additional monitoring that EPA is conducting,” said Bridget Lee, attorney at Earthjustice. “The fact that avgas-fueled aircraft contribute to lead air pollution and the dangers associated with such pollution are well-documented. EPA has sufficient data to move forward with an endangerment finding and should do so without further delay.”

Other resources:

- [FAA Memo: Interim Guidance on Mitigating Public Risks Associated with Lead Emissions from Avgas](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Monitoring The Air For Lead Near The San Carlos Airport](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Monitoring The Air For Lead Near The McClellan-Palomar Airport And Gillespie Field](#)
- [EPA announcement of monitoring data](#)
- [EPA Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and other announcements](#)

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