

The Wallace Street Journal

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Death at Doe Run

Wallace, Idaho – While our first Affirmative Action president fiddles, Nero-like, over the smoking rubble that was the American economy, few outside of the gun-nut community – of which we are card-carrying members – noticed the newest death-rattle, this emanating from the small (pop. 3,468) town of Herculaneum, Missouri.

There in Herculaneum, at year-end, we will witness the demise of Doe Run, this nation's last primary lead smelter and in operation since 1892 – thanks, once again, to the goal post-moving United Snakes Environmental Protection Agency and its lackeys in the green movement.

When we started paying attention to the mining industry some 40 years ago, twenty primary lead smelters operated in the U.S. By the time of the closure of the Bunker Hill smelter in Kellogg, Idaho, at the end of 1981 we were down to six.

And now there will be none. (Copper is in nearly as dire straits, with only three primary copper smelters left in the U.S., and for the same “greenie” reasons.)

What happened was, the EPA, prodded by a St. Louis-based environmental pressure group, decided in 2008 that its existing maximum for lead present in the air should be dropped 10-fold, from 1.5 micrograms of lead per cubic meter of air to 0.15 micrograms of lead in a cubic meter of air.

It was the 1.5 microgram standard, adopted in 1978 and a 10-fold ratcheting-down of the previous 15-microgram standard, that forced the Bunker Hill smelter to shut down. Given a downturn in commodity prices, Bunker Hill's Houston, Texas owners decided it wasn't worth it to try to comply with the then-new rule.

And now the U.S. EPA is enforcing an ambient lead-in-air standard 10 times more stringent than the one that killed Bunker Hill.

Get out your slide rule: A microgram is one-millionth of a gram. A cubic meter of air weighs about 1,300 grams, or 1.3 billion micrograms. So, the old lead-air standard of 1.5 micrograms works out to 1.95 parts per billion, [a level deemed “unacceptable”](#) by Obama-appointed EPA chief enforcer Cynthia Giles back in 2010.

([Bloviated the Boston Globe](#) at the time of Giles's appointment: “New England environmentalist nominated to EPA post,” arising from the muck of “vice president and director of the Conservation Law Foundation's Rhode Island advocacy center, where she has focused on climate change.”)

The stringent new Herculaneum-killing standard isn't even two-tenths of one part of lead per billion parts of air: it is 1.95 *tenths* of one part per billion.

Even with lead removed from household paints and gasoline, this country still uses about 1.5 million tonnes of it in any given year, a considerable percentage of the 9.35 million tonnes used annually

worldwide. The Doe Run smelter at Herculaneum supplied 8 percent of lead used in the U.S. The rest we get from imports, and from domestic secondary smelters that recycle lead but can't produce it from newly-mined concentrates.

Lead is required in all those nice green solar-cell and windmill generators, and in your computer and TV sets. More than 80 percent of our domestic use of lead goes into starting batteries. Other uses include insulation, ceramics, casting metals, glass, and shielding from all manner of radiation. It ain't going away unless we retreat back into the cave.

Oh, did we forget bullets? Yes, bullets use lead. Which is why our gun-nut cohorts are a bit stirred up, we suspect.

Convert the agonal Doe Run smelter's annual 120,000-tonne lead output into battle-rifle bullets and you get a lot of them: 10,582,188,617 (ten and a half billion) of your heavier 30-calibre variety at 175 grains a pop, or about 33,670,600,145 (thirty-three and a half billion) bullets for an M-16 shooting a 55-grain projectile.

God forbid the progressives or the neo-cons (as if there is a difference) get us into a gunfight with China. "Excuse us, would you mind refining these lead concentrates for us, so we can cast it into bullets and shoot you?"

"Better stock up on bullets now," [warns](#) Jonathan DuHamel of the Tucson *Citizen*.

Nevertheless, others are happy, happy, happy about the cashiering of 270 jobs at Doe Run and the small town's loss of \$1 million in annual property tax revenues from the smelter.

As 270 Herculaneum families start foraging through dumpsters for their next meal and begging strangers for rent money, Kathleen Logan Smith of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment says they can "[begin to prepare for a cleaner future.](#)"

If a smokestack falls in a ghost town, does anybody hear?