

## NEWS RELEASE

Mount Isa, 27 March 2008

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETS TO FORM LIVING WITH LEAD ALLIANCE

The inaugural meeting of the Executive Committee of the *Living with Lead Alliance* was held last Wednesday to discuss the development of a long term initiative by key community leaders to promote living with lead in Mount Isa and to ensure community health is maintained.

Members of the Executive Committee include:

- **Betty Kiernan** – State Member for Mount Isa
- **Councillor John Molony** - Mayor, Mount Isa City Council
- **John Piispanen** – Director of Environmental Health, Tropical Population Health Unit, Queensland Health
- **Gary O'Connor** – Manager, Project Support Integrated Assessment Branch Environmental Operations, Environmental Protection Agency
- **Steve de Kruijff** – Chief Operating Officer, Xstrata Copper

Mrs Betty Kiernan, who was appointed Chairman of the Executive Committee, said in its inaugural meeting the committee adopted a Terms of Reference, developed the *Living with Lead Alliance* name, and importantly, discussed preliminary key indicators from Queensland Health's preliminary *Get Bled for Lead* screening program report.

"Key community leaders have not waited to improve lead management in Mount Isa, and have been working closely together in the background to develop future initiatives," said Mrs Kiernan.

"The *Living with Lead Alliance* is a perfect vehicle to deliver these initiatives to the community.

"We fully realise and know that through community education, provision of information and the ongoing voluntary monitoring of lead in blood levels of our residents that Mount Isa will continue to be a safe community for all to live," she said.

Mrs Kiernan also said further action on lead management would be considered once Queensland Health released its official *Get Bled for Lead* screening program report and recommendations in approximately six to eight weeks.

"It is important to obtain the full results and analysis of the testing program of 403 children aged 1 to 4 years before definitive, long term action can be taken by the *Living in Lead Alliance*," Mrs Kiernan said.

"The full report will identify the priorities Queensland Health, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Mount Isa City Council, Xstrata Mount Isa Mines and other

community stakeholders need to act on in order to sustainably manage lead levels in Mount Isa.

“The reality is that lead is literally part of the foundations of our community and we all have a responsibility to ensure we manage our exposure to this naturally occurring mineral in our homes, gardens, workplaces and environment.

“For our part, the health of the Mount Isa community is something we take very seriously and the *Living with Lead Alliance* welcomes any future recommendations by Queensland Health regarding the ongoing monitoring and reporting of children’s lead levels in Mount Isa,” she said.

The preliminary key indicators discussed by the Executive Committee last week included that of the 403 children tested, 11% had a lead in blood level greater than the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendation of 10 micrograms per decilitre.

The average reading within the sample size was just under five micrograms per deciliter which is half of the WHO recommended level.

In addition, a number of patterns have emerged:

- non-indigenous children made up 80% of the sample and had an average lead in blood level of 4.5 micrograms per decilitre; and
- Indigenous children made up 20% of the sample and had an average lead in blood level of 7 micrograms per decilitre.

Mrs Kiernan said that it should be noted that generally there would be an expectation that the levels would decrease as children grow older and that young children were more likely to be exposed to lead because of their habit of putting contaminated hands, food or objects in their mouths.

“The environmental audits in the community, undertaken by Queensland Health, revealed a few common factors which may be contributing to high lead levels in some of these children within the 11% category – among these are: young ones eating dirt and non-food items, thumb sucking, keeping pets inside homes (over 50% of this group allowed pets inside houses), having bare soil in yards, and allowing a build-up of dust inside homes,” Mrs Kiernan said. “All of these factors are preventable”.

“In addition, results showed no pattern in their geographical spread in Mount Isa and it has become quite clear that there is no concentration of children in any one suburb or area,” she said.

The community is reminded there are several simple steps parents can take to minimise the risk of lead exposure to their child. These include:

- Wash the face and hands of children before they eat or sleep.
- Discourage children from putting hands and other objects in their mouths.
- Wash all fruit and vegetables before eating.
- Use mops rather than brooms, to reduce the amount of dust that becomes airborne while cleaning.
- Use a wet cloth for dusting, instead of a dry cloth.
- Regularly wash family pets.
- Encourage children to play in grassy areas where the ground cover is good and not in areas of exposed dirt.
- Good nutrition, including the minerals calcium, iron and zinc can help reduce lead absorption.

The *Living with Lead Alliance* will meet on a monthly basis until the release of the Queensland Health report at which time it will meet on a quarterly basis. Regular updates will also be provided to the community regarding the Alliance's living with lead initiatives.

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**For further information**

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