gasoline, Houk says, "is not in the interest of the children of the United States." Recent government actions have upset Houk for two reasons: First, they could make possible an increase in airborne lead pollution, and second, the Administration has just dismantled the CDC's system for monitoring and protecting children against lead poisoning. The CDC budget of $10 million for screening children has been cut to $7.5 million and transferred into a $300-million block grant program run from the central offices of the Department of Health and Human Services. There the program will be in danger of losing its identity, if not its life.

Houk unequivocally finds a link between the use of leaded gasoline and high levels of lead in the blood. He mentions that his samples, taken from children in 60 cities, show that the mean lead level in blood declined from 1977 to 1980 by 25.6 percent. This surprising figure has been carefully examined. Houk says he is virtually certain now that it was not produced by a statistical anomaly: "We know that this was a real reduction," he says, and "the only thing we know that changed in the environment during that time was that there was a 30 percent reduction in the amount of leaded gasoline used in this country."

The toxic effects of high doses of lead are well understood and documented. More worrisome, research done in the last 3 years shows quite convincingly that there is a relationship between the amount of lead a child ingests and problems in thinking and learning. Furthermore, this sort of poisoning appears tc be caused by what until recently were considered "safe" levels of lead exposure.

By all accounts, the best evidence of this phenomenon appeared in a study published in 1979 by Herbert Needleman, now at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. His work has now been confirmed by two independent studies published last September, one conducted in West Germany by G. Winneke, and the second in England by W. Yule.

Needleman recruited teachers in the schools of Boston to play tooth fairy and collect a baby tooth from each pupil. The teeth were sawed open and analyzed for lead. The children were then divided into a high-lead and a low-lead group, and the two groups were compared with regard to scores on IQ tests and teachers' reports. The mean IQ of the high-lead children was four points lower than that of the low-lead children, and the teachers consistently rated the high-lead children worse on 11 behavioral qualities such as "distractible," "frustrated," and "unable to follow sequences." The bad scores were clearly dose-related as well, bringing Needleman to the conclusion that "lead may increase the risk of undesirable behaviors in the classroom at doses considerably below those found in our group with high lead levels."

Lead poisoning has some unique and ugly aspects. First, it is difficult and expensive to spot at low doses. It can only be detected with confidence by using the kind of blood sampling that the CDC has been told to stop doing. Second, the effects may be pernicious and long-lived, since they seem to impair the neurological development of children, creating intellectual deficits. Third, the

Watt and the Wilderness

Secretary of the Interior James Watt pulled a fast one on the environmentalists recently. Interviewed on the Sunday television show "Meet the Press" on 21 February, he announced an apparent turnaround in the Administration's policy toward the wilderness. Despite his persistent calls to "open up" wilderness areas for oil and minerals development, he told interviewers that he was recommending legislation to safeguard wilderness from development for the rest of the century. Newspaper reports of the announcement the following day included guardedly favorable comments from environmental groups.

That was before they saw Watt's actual legislative proposal, which was introduced in the House on 24 February by Representative Manuel Lujan (R–N.M.). Environmentalists are horrified by the proposal. The Wilderness Society issued a press release accusing Watt of a "massive public relations deception," and nine environmental groups promptly signed a letter sent to all members of Congress in which they labeled the Interior measure an "anti-wilderness bill."

Basically, the measure would nullify the fundamental thrust of the Wilderness Act of 1964, which is to close the wilderness system permanently to new mining claims and mineral leasing by the end of 1983. Watt's proposal, the Wilderness Inventory and Protection Act, would close the system to such claims immediately, but only until 2000. Furthermore, it includes a provision allowing the President, without congressional concurrence, to issue an order opening lands to mineral activities if he decides there is an "urgent national need" for specified resources.

The legislation also establishes what environmentalists claim are unrealistic deadlines for additions to the wilderness system. Currently there are 80 million acres in the system, 56 million of them in Alaska. An additional 7.3 million acres of National Forest Service land currently await wilderness designation by Congress; 12.2 million more acres are still under study for possible inclusion. Another 24 million acres are being studied by the Bureau of Land Management in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The bill would give the President unilateral authority to release them from wilderness study status and open them to development. National forest lands, which are managed by the Department of Agriculture, would be permanently released from consideration as wilderness areas if they are not recommended for inclusion in the wilderness system by 30 September 1985, or placed in the system by the end of 1987. Thus, in absence of new congressional legislation, additions to the wilderness system would be impossible after 1987.

Watt's proposal would retain prohibitions on exploratory drilling in wilderness but would permit mineral probes, including seismic surveys. It also would prohibit establishment of "buffer zones" around wilderness areas.

Watt said in his television appearance that this proposal was a "change of tactics" but not of goal. The Interior Department has gotten into political trouble in the West by breaking with the policy of past administrations not to grant oil and gas drilling leases in wilderness areas. By calling for an immediate prohibition on leasing, says Tim Mahoney of the Sierra Club, Watt can garner some short-term goodwill while holding fast to long-term designs.—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

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