

EPA recommends lower lead standards

Nov. 2 -- A key document issued by EPA staffers recommends that the agency strengthen its national air quality standards for lead to better protect children.

The paper recommends that the Environmental Protection Agency lower the lead standards from the current level of 1.5 micrograms per cubic meter, agency spokeswoman Margot Perez-Sullivan said Thursday. It suggests a revised standard ranging from a high of 0.2 micrograms per cubic meter to a low of 0.05 micrograms per cubic meter.

Staff members based the final paper on a review of current science about lead and health. The Clean Air Act requires the EPA to periodically review air quality standards to ensure it provides adequate health and environmental protection.

Average lead concentrations in the air have dropped 96 percent since 1980, primarily as a result of the ban on lead in motor vehicle gasoline.

By the end of November, EPA will issue a notice outlining policy options the agency is considering. The agency is required by a consent decree to issue a proposal on lead standards by May 1 and a final rule by Sept. 1. The agency plans to issue the proposal in March to provide ample time for public comment.