



## Exide will pay for blood tests for Petone residents

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Free blood tests are being offered to Petone residents afraid they may have been poisoned by lead from a nearby battery recycling plant.

The move comes as the Exide plant prepares to seek renewal of its consents for the controversial factory this month.

The plant has been dogged by problems, including harmful lead emissions, an explosion and a fire, and Exide has been convicted twice for breaching emission standards. Recent monitoring showed lead levels were well within allowable limits.

According to the company's latest newsletter, consultation before the consent renewal application revealed residents had fears over the potential health effects of lead exposure.

Lead poisoning can affect brain development, and cause vomiting, stomach pains, loss of appetite and, in extreme cases, brain damage and death.

Yesterday, Deborah Tala, who has lived near the plant for more than 30 years, said she was concerned at the possible effects of long-term exposure. "I know one solution, that's for them to move."

She planned to take up the blood-testing offer.

The voluntary tests are available to anyone living or working within 250 metres of the Exide plant.

Tests will be taken by a nurse at Exide's cost. Results will be reported back to individuals. They will be sent to Exide and made public at the resource consent hearing, without revealing individual identities.

The company performed community blood-lead testing in the United States at plants in Indiana and Texas, where about 800 people were tested, spokesman Mark Unsworth said. "In all but two adults in Frisco, we have seen no elevated blood-lead levels. The two adults with elevated levels were revealed to have occupational exposure to lead."

Regular tests of Exide workers at Petone had not revealed elevated lead levels.

Next door to Exide, El Cheapo cars manager Brendan Coughlan said he had a private blood test three years ago that was clear. "If there was going to be a problem we would be the first to get it."

Exide should move, he said.



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Fisherman Joseph Johnston, an East St resident, said he would get tested but was not especially worried about lead poisoning.

Hutt South MP Trevor Mallard said he encouraged all eligible people to get a test and the testing area should be extended if there were any positive results.

He opposed Exide renewing its resource consent.

- The Dominion Post