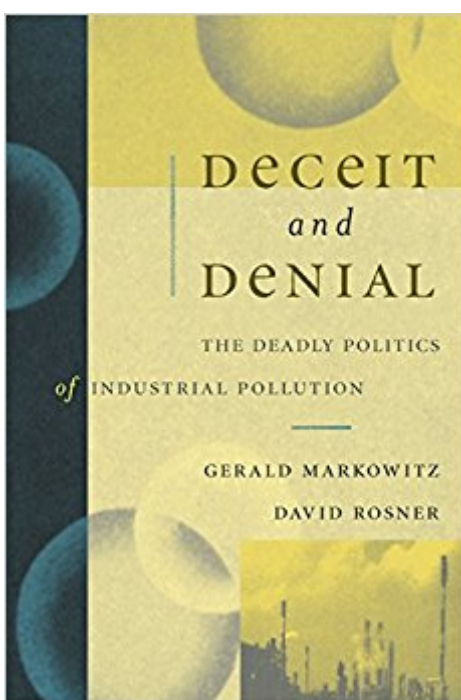


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# Deceit And Denial: The Deadly Politics Of Industrial Pollution (California / Milbank Books On Health And The Public, No. 6)



## Synopsis

Deceit and Denial details the attempts by the chemical and lead industries to deceive Americans about the dangers that their deadly products present to workers, the public, and consumers. Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner pursued evidence steadily and relentlessly, interviewed the important players, investigated untapped sources, and uncovered a bruising story of cynical and cruel disregard for health and human rights. This resulting exposé is full of startling revelations, provocative arguments, and disturbing conclusions--all based on remarkable research and information gleaned from secret industry documents. This book reveals for the first time the public relations campaign that the lead industry undertook to convince Americans to use its deadly product to paint walls, toys, furniture, and other objects in America's homes, despite a wealth of information that children were at risk for serious brain damage and death from ingesting this poison. This book highlights the immediate dangers ordinary citizens face because of the relentless failure of industrial polluters to warn, inform, and protect their workers and neighbors. It offers a historical analysis of how corporate control over scientific research has undermined the process of proving the links between toxic chemicals and disease. The authors also describe the wisdom, courage, and determination of workers and community members who continue to voice their concerns in spite of vicious opposition. Readable, pathbreaking, and revelatory, Deceit and Denial provides crucial answers to questions of dangerous environmental degradation, escalating corporate greed, and governmental disregard for its citizens' safety and health.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a historical account of corporate control of the lead, plastics, and petroleum industries and the campaign of denial regarding the toxic effects on workers, consumers, and the general public of chemicals used in the manufacture of paint, toys, furniture, plastics, and other products. Coauthors of *Deadly Dust: Silicosis and the Politics of Occupational Disease in Twentieth Century America*, Markowitz (history, John Jay Coll. of Criminal Justice, CUNY) and Rosner (history and public health, Columbia Univ.) conducted interviews, examined documents, and pursued additional investigations to expose corporate greed and deception and governmental foot dragging that disregarded public-health risks through much of the 20th century. They allege that industry officials lied about the dangers, failed to protect workers, fooled the public, and kept regulators at bay. Corporate control over scientific research also undermined efforts to inform the public about the relationships between toxic chemicals and disease. However, this is not another diatribe about industrial pollution. Instead, it is a well-researched work that analyzes the conflict between industry's need to provide products that make life easier for consumers and the public's demand for legislation and standards to protect them from toxic pollution caused by the manufacture of these products. Recommended for health, environment, and law collections. Irwin Weintraub, Brooklyn Coll. Lib., NY Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

*Deceit and Denial* chronicles the history of poisoning by environmental lead and vinyl chloride. Parts of the stories have been told before, but recent litigation has forced thousands of once-secret industry documents into the open, revealing long-standing conspiracies to conceal evidence of the hazards of these two agents from the American public. Lead is an old but continuing industrial hazard. Italy's Bernardino Ramazzini, in his book *Diseases of Workers*, published in 1713, lamented the poisoning of potters and painters by lead-glazing fumes and lead paints, respectively. Markowitz and Rosner show that new forms of lead poisoning emerged in the 20th century primarily as a result of the manufacture of tetraethyl lead, which was introduced as an antiknock compound for gasoline, and the increasing affordability of lead-based paint, valued for its durability and whiteness. Neuropathologies were common in the 1920s in plants that manufactured leaded gasoline, which prompted workers in one New Jersey factory to christen it the "loony-bin building" and the "house of butterflies" (because of employees' hallucinations of winged insects). Lead paints were widely used on interior walls, furniture, and children's toys, causing poisoning through the ingestion or inhalation

of cretinizing dusts. Efforts to ban leaded gasoline began in the 1920s and succeeded in some countries, but the Ethyl Gasoline Corporation managed to convince short-sighted politicians in the United States that smooth-running cars were worth the costs to health. Automobiles were a relative rarity in the 1920s, but by 1964 more than 200,000 tons of lead were being spewed into the air by cars and trucks. By this time, lead had found its way into everything from toy soldiers and toothpaste tubes to synthetic pearls and the pipes used for indoor plumbing. Markowitz and Rosner explain that many of the most injurious products were kept on the market long after they had been identified as harmful. Coordinated by the Lead Industries Association (founded in 1928), manufacturers mounted advertising campaigns to put a positive face on lead. Lead was deliberately marketed as child-friendly -- by means of comic books and the pervasive Dutch Boy logo, which the authors suggest was a kind of metallic Joe Camel. In a remarkable advertisement reproduced in the book, the National Lead Company depicts a happy infant reaching for a can of evaporated or condensed milk, which is kept "pure" by the drop of lead solder used to seal the can. Markowitz and Rosner write as medical historians, but their book could prove to be of legal interest, given that the industry, now facing lawsuits, has claimed that nothing was known about the chronic hazards associated with lead until 1943, when Randolph Byers and Elizabeth Lord documented such effects in an article in the *American Journal of Diseases of Children*. Using internal industry documents, Markowitz and Rosner show that the lead industry in the United States was well aware of the hazard decades before the publication of the article by Byers and Lord but chose to respond to it primarily as a public-relations problem. Several countries, including France, Belgium, Austria, Greece, Great Britain, Spain, and Cuba, either banned or restricted the use of lead paint for interior surfaces even before the First World War. But the U.S. lead industry campaigned effectively against such regulations, promoting lead not just as safe and patriotic but also as "an apparent gift of God," in the words of the first vice-president of Ethyl Gasoline Corporation. Even after the possibility of harm was admitted, industry officials blamed parents for allowing their children to chew on the bars of their cribs or to suck on their fingers. A medical condition known as "pica" was invoked, as the industry attributed lead poisoning to an unnatural tendency of infants to put things in their mouths. The evidence of hazards to workers in vinyl chloride plants, such as angiosarcoma of the liver, was treated as a trade secret by manufacturers wanting to avoid "a public relations and legal nightmare," write the authors. The authors also explain that in the late 1990s, the residents of Convent, Louisiana, who were overwhelmingly poor and black, organized to stop Shintech Corporation from building a \$700 million vinyl chloride plant by convincing the Environmental Protection Agency that the decision to build in Convent constituted environmental racism. I learned a few surprising things.

For example, computer monitors, on average, contain four pounds of lead. Lead was never an additive in paint (added as a tint, for instance) but rather was the pigment itself. (Lead paint is simply lead carbonate or lead oxide to which a flattening agent such as linseed oil has been added.) Lead chromate was once used to give a yellow color to bread and cakes. For more than 30 years, the Ethyl Corporation and General Motors monopolized the study of lead poisoning and provided overly optimistic estimates of how much of the metal the human body can safely withstand. Markowitz and Rosner describe their own surprise at learning that such historical diseases as silicosis, which they thought was long dead, still exist today. Moreover, one should not forget that these are global maladies. Leaded gasoline is still used in many parts of the world, "sugar of lead" (lead acetate) is still used in Mexico as a medicine for stomach disorders, and food is still cooked in lead vessels in parts of India to give it a distinctive flavor. It may not be true, as some scholars once postulated, that lead consumption caused the fall of Rome, but it is true that poisonings are going to continue to occur throughout the world for decades, as peeling paint turns to dust, as leaded gas fuels cars, and as years of ignorance and industrial neglect take their toll. Robert N. Proctor, Ph.D. © 2003 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The New England Journal of Medicine is a registered trademark of the MMS.

Markowitz has written an instant classic detailing the rise of the lead pushers headed by General Motors in the last century. In spite of the fact that we have known about the toxicity of lead for two thousand years, we still have leaded aviation fuel legally sold due to corrupt lobbyists. You'll be shocked and infuriated by the deceit and denial well documented in the book. Great illustrations, the ads for Dutch Boy lead paint seem as unreal as those of doctors recommending cigarettes.

Whether we know it or not, we all cherish a Whiggish view of history - mankind emerging from dank darkness and ignorance of the past into the sunny destiny of modern civilisation. Such is the stuff of fairy tales, and the child within us will not let us accept any other. Basing themselves on historical documentation unearthed in litigation to which the US chemical industry has been submitted over the recent decades, the authors - historians both - have portrayed two grim tales of deceit and denial. The first involves lead, whose poisonous character was known since time immemorial, and yet was used indiscriminately in paint, and then in gasoline. The second is the history of vinyl chloride, the mainstay of the petrochemical industry, whose cancer-causing character was long denied. Lead was defeated by technology. Other minerals made better paint bases, and lead in gasoline was banned when catalytic converters were added to the petrol engine. The current

gasoline additives are just as cancerous - but that's a story still to be written. Caught out in lies and deceit in the '70s about the cancerous effects of vinyl chloride, the petrochemical industry reeled, and knuckled under. It did not even cost them that much. As indicated at pg. 223, the industry paid \$270 million dollars for doing a job that it had estimated would cost \$90 billion - and the government thought it might cost \$1 billion. But the industry learned its lesson. It would not submit again to the checks and balances of a democratic society. Politicians were bought, courts intimidated - and heck, science needs research money. A successful campaign against 'big government' was launched, and 'deregulation' mania swept the land - self-regulation is to solve all problems. Now the governor from the dirtiest state of the Union - and proud of it - is in the White House. The end of the book is a distressing description of the rearguard battles fought by the citizens of Louisiana to avoid that 'cancer lane' - as the region between Baton Rouge and New Orleans is dubbed - become upgraded to 'cancer super-highway'. The list of the participants in this story of denial and deceit are not the 'dirty back-yard tinkers', the scum of the chemical earth. The best of the finest of the sector are involved, individually, and in Associations. Past errors or malfeasance is no object. We do not learn from past mistakes. Except better to cover up our misdeeds.

This is solid contribution to science and society: timely, insightful and well-written. Our government needs to heed the revelations of this great book. Industries need to be regulated so that their toxic impact may be minimized and eliminated. No one should produce and sell products that threaten public health and the environment.

Very well written, information not readily available elsewhere, eye opening. Makes one wonder about today's business influence in government. Where did all the questioning and the openness of the sixties go.

Arrived quickly and brand new. Really strong in providing the author's case.

Two respected historians of environmental health weigh in on two of the twentieth century's biggest sources of industrial pollution--lead and plastics. Equipped with an incredible bounty of inside-the-industry documents gleaned from major toxic tort law suits, the authors uncover more smoking guns than you're likely to find in a Sam Peckinpah film. You'll never look at the Dutch Boy the same way again.

This is a well written, well documented and absolutely amazing account of pollution politics in the U.S. From the authors' case studies of lead and PVC we can learn how to interpret the "facts," and what to look for, in similar pollution issues of today. We need more "gutsy" accounts like this from academics and their publishers. Michael Meuser, Editor and Publisher

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