

Media Release

Environment Protection Authority



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July deadline for operating improvements at Port Pirie Smelter

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The Environment Protection Authority has given Port Pirie smelter operators Nyrstar until the end of July to put additional steps in place to reduce lead emissions from the smelter.

This follows Nyrstar's response to the EPA's request for an explanation for two 'spikes' in emissions late in 2009, in light of subsequent recent Health Department figures showing increases in blood levels of children.

These spikes were confirmed in data analysis earlier this year and meant that lead emission levels increased after having been in steady decline since 2006.

EPA Director of Regulation and Compliance Keith Baldry said that, while Nyrstar had put many actions in place and made technical improvements to the plant which over the past four years had been achieving steadily lower emissions, the recent increase meant that the EPA now required further improvements.

"While Nyrstar has provided the EPA with detailed technical data explaining conditions at the plant and the possible impact these have had on emissions, the EPA believes further actions can be taken to reduce emissions," Mr Baldry said.

Steps the EPA will require of Nyrstar by the end of July are:

- Make a rigorous analysis of the cause of every case of higher emissions in future
- Strengthened procedures to ensure that personnel can make effective decisions to prevent emissions in all conditions
- Making better use of monitoring data to investigate problems and make quick and effective decisions to reduce emissions.

In addition, the EPA will be imposing additional limits on emissions. As well as the current allowable limit based on an average reading over a period of time, maximum daily emissions will be set at key monitoring sites within Port Pirie.

"We recognise that lead emissions are of significant concern to the Port Pirie community, and that, while Nyrstar has been successful in reducing its emissions over the longer term, that more stringent targets are now needed to get back on track and continue the downward trend. We believe Nyrstar will be able to meet these targets.

"This means not just coming up with technical solutions to make equipment work more efficiently, but also having procedures in place to ensure that when production problems occur, they are managed quickly.

"As well as corresponding formally with Nyrstar, we have met with the company and are satisfied that they are treating this issue with priority. The EPA will continue to work with Nyrstar and provide any advice and support we can in order to help reduce their emissions."

The EPA will also formally investigate whether the two spikes in emissions generate grounds for a penalty or other enforcement action to be imposed.

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