OBITUARY: Lloyd Smythe – co-author of the "end-of-leaded-petrol-in-Oz" study

Obituary - Emeritus Professor Lloyd Earle Smythe: Distinguished analytical chemist

See the full Obituary by Paul R Haddad, on page 30, Chemistry in Australia, January/February 2019, at https://chemaust.raci.org.au/sites/default/files/pdf/2019/CiA_Jan%3AFeb%202019.pdf – extracts appear below:

"Lloyd Smythe was born in Suva, Fiji, on 15 June 1922…

"He was involved in two very high-profile research projects. The first was a comprehensive study of the lead burden of Sydney schoolchildren. Blood from 1200 Sydney area schoolchildren was analysed over a three-year period and showed that the lead levels were unacceptably high and could result in severe neurological damage. This lead was due primarily to air pollution from the exhausts of vehicles and Smythe's study eventually led to the reduction and later removal of lead in Australian petrols, despite a long battle with the 'lead lobby'.

"In 2001, Smythe was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia 'for service to science through education and research, particularly the development of the discipline of analytical chemistry'. He died aged 96 on 3 September 2018 at his home at Mt Eymard in Bowral and his wife of 73 years died five days later on 8 September. They were buried together at Bowral Cemetery.

"Lloyd Smythe made a profound impact on Australian chemistry and he can be credited with the establishment of analytical chemistry as an accepted subdiscipline of chemistry in this country. He was an 'old school' professor: very distinguished looking, always wore a suit and tie, and always a true gentleman who was caring and polite to his staff and students. He leaves a great legacy to us all, especially those who were fortunate enough to work with him."

Additional notes by Elizabeth O'Brien, Editor, LEAD Action News:

"Smythe's study" referred to by Haddad (above), was *Lead Burden Of Sydney School Children*, by Garnys, VP; Freeman, R and Smythe, LE, published by The University of NSW - Dept of Analytical Chemistry in 1979. This study was pivotal and marked the beginning of the end of leaded petrol in Australia. The study was used by advocates who preceded The LEAD Group, in the policy processes which saw:

the introduction of unleaded petrol in Australia in 1985,

legislation making unleaded petrol the only-fuel-permitted for new cars sold as of 1986, as well as

a reduction in the maximum amount of lead permitted in leaded petrol in various states from the early 1980s.

The Garnys et al (1979) "school children lead study" was also my introduction to the neurological impacts of lead, as I wrote in Chapter 1 of "Local Heroes":

"…I remembered from my teaching days a blood lead survey of the children in the school at which I taught [Gardeners Road Public School in Rosebery] showed they all had high levels of lead. 'That's why they're all so stupid and so difficult to teach', one of the teachers told me."

Inspired by this study and my own children's lead poisoning (including by lead from vehicle exhausts that still filled the air and settled in house dust and on soil in the mid-1980s when my first child was born), I have worked to make the world lead-safe since 1990 – and I am truly thankful to fine researchers such as Dr Vyt Garnys, Dr Ronald Freeman and the late Emeritus Professor Lloyd Smythe for getting me started.