

This study examines how living with unsafe and degrading infrastructures leading to lead poisoning in Southern California is an embodied experience mediated by class, race, and late industrialism. Lead poisoning, largely the result of old and decaying underground infrastructures, is often imperceptible until a person presents symptoms of the illness. Even still, it might take years and repeated exposures for enough lead to build up in a body in order for symptoms to appear and even then, symptoms may never fully manifest. Lead is both invisible to the naked eye when it is infrastructure and can continue to be invisible even when in a body. Ultimately, people often are unaware of lead in their living spaces until they present with symptoms of lead poisoning. The body, itself, becomes a vessel in which people learn about the harms of a particular place. How, then, is it possible for either the public or the state to intervene and raise awareness on lead poisoning before a person (usually a child) experiences this potentially life changing illness? Through interviews with local and state officials, Southern California residents who have or had lead poisoning, and people living in lead hotspots, this study will explore how actors in Southern California come or do not come to understand lead as a potential risk. What are the factors that make lead visible and lead poisoning legible to some people while others are still unaware? What factors mediate people's actions towards mitigating one's possibility of getting lead poisoning? Why are some communities more proactive and others less proactive?