



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on November 5, 2013

EPA Shutting Down Last-standing U.S. Primary Lead Smelter

The last standing primary lead smelter (shown) in the United States will be closing in December — thanks to the federal Environmental Protection Agency’s continuing war on American industry. While environmental militants may cheer the demise of the Doe Run Company smelter in Herculaneum, Missouri, as an ecological “victory,” the plant’s closure will have little-to-no positive environmental impact, while causing significant economic harm. The potential implications for individual liberty and national security could prove to be even more significant. Meanwhile, Congress continues to permit the EPA to wreak havoc on the American economy, with draconian regulations that have no basis in science and are causing incalculable harm. EPA regulations, for example, are [closing hundreds of coal-fired electrical plants](#) and are [now targeting natural gas](#), which has been one of the few bright spots in our national economy, producing (together with unconventional oil production) [1.7 million jobs](#).



Once Doe Run’s Herculaneum smelter closes there will be no facility left in the United States to process lead ore. A dozen or so secondary smelters will remain to process recycled batteries and other products containing lead, but there is no reason to believe that the EPA’s ever-tightening noose will not eventually order them closed as well. The Herculaneum smelter, which has operated in the same location since 1892, began its shutdown in 2010, after the company [concluded an agreement with the EPA](#).

Tammy Stankey, a public affairs spokesperson at the Doe Run Company, told *The New American* that the Herculaneum smelter, which once employed over 300, will continue to employ around 75 workers for some time in non-lead-smelting jobs.

Global Lead Demand Expected to Continue to Rise

While the EPA is closing the last U.S. lead smelting plant, the International Lead Association (ILA), reported in London on October 22 that the global demand for the base metal is expected to continue rising. The [ILA reported](#):

According to the International Lead Zinc Study Group (ILZSG), global demand for lead is expected



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to increase 5 percent in 2013 and an additional 4.6 percent in 2014. Demand for lead in the U.S. is expected to increase by 7.6 percent in 2013, bolstered by both original equipment purchases of new vehicles and replacement purchases of lead-acid batteries.

Almost 90 percent of lead production in the United States is consumed in making storage batteries. The vast majority of those batteries are for automobiles, trucks, and other motor vehicles. However, many commercial and governmental institutions use large storage batteries for electrical generating facilities, computer centers, telecommunications, medical equipment, air traffic control towers, and more.

“Recent lead-acid battery optimism is reinforced,” says the ILA, “by the fact that other battery technologies have yet to reach the high recycling rate of lead-acid options. In the U.S., 98 percent of spent lead-acid batteries are collected and returned to permitted recyclers, which recycle both lead and plastic, keeping 2.4 million tons of batteries out of landfills.”

Lithium-ion batteries and nickel-metal hydride batteries have not lived up to their early hype and there is no viable replacement on the near horizon for the lead-acid batteries that are essential for the millions of cars now on the road and the millions more that will be rolling off production lines in coming years.

Hold on to your Lead

The second largest use of lead in the U.S., after storage batteries, is for ammunition. With ammunition already difficult to obtain and prices of ammo already skyrocketing, the Doe Run closure can only make matters worse.

Competing with automobiles and ammunition for a dwindling supply of available domestic lead are: ceramic glazes, shielding for X-rays and other radiation, concrete, electronics, glass lenses, paints and coating, paper, silverware and tableware, wire and cable insulation.

As might be expected, [MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow Show](#) saw concerns about the closure as an opportunity to ridicule “wacky uncle conspiracy theorists” who, according to MSNBC, see a gun-grab plot behind every federal action. However, as our many reports on the Obama administration’s actions in the Fast and Furious scandal involving gun-running by U.S. federal agencies to Mexico’s deadly drug cartels show (see [here](#) and [here](#)), the “conspiracy theorists” may not be so whacky after all.

It is likely, though, that the EPA’s environmental extremists view the hit to ammunition costs and availability imposed by the Doe Run closure as simply a serendipitous twofer, an incidental bonus they get for free, in addition to further hamstringing the manufacturing and natural resources industries of what remains of the private productive sector of America’s economy.

As usual, one of the main beneficiaries of this action will be the People’s Republic of China, which is the world’s largest producer of lead. If Congress allows the EPA’s lead standards to rule, the United States will become increasingly hostage to China for lead, as we have already become for [rare earth elements](#).

From a purely environmental standpoint, this new global lead hegemony by the Beijing regime should be of major concern to the green activists who live by the mantra, “Think globally, act locally.” China, which may be the world’s worst environmental offender, can hardly be expected to do a better job than Doe Run in dealing with lead residues and contaminants in an ecologically responsible manner.

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