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**Streetcorner Environmental Injustice:  
Begging and Lead Intake among Small Children in Quito, Ecuador**

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Every weekday morning in Quito, Ecuador some poor Amerindian mothers take their small children to intersections in the streets where the children spend the day begging from passing motorists. The parents take their children to intersections with stop lights in streets with medians and station the children in the median (see



diagram). When cars stop at the lights, the children run up to the front doors of the cars (it is convenient because the driver's side is closest to the median) with their hands outstretched, palms up. The most common scene involves a small child, aged three to six, looking up at a driver behind the rolled up window of a sport utility vehicle. When the light changes, the cars, light trucks, and trucks accelerate, emitting a cloud of exhaust, and the children run back to the median. Unfortunately, gasoline in Ecuador is still leaded, so the particular way in which begging occurs in this increasingly motorized society maximizes the children's exposure to lead from the vehicles' exhaust. Studies show elevated levels of lead in the blood of street children.

The lead from the gasoline makes it into the children in other, related ways. Studies show a direct relationship between distance from the road (in meters) and the deposition of lead in soils (Newsome, Aranguen, and Brinkmann 1997). When children play in the grass and dirt on the median, as they do almost all of the time, they take in additional amounts of lead. The same thing happens when they play in the small front yards on either side of the street.

There are plans to refine and sell unleaded gasoline in Ecuador, but it has not happened yet. Because many other countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America continue to produce and consume leaded gasoline, the street children in these places undoubtedly suffer in similar ways.

Reference

Newsome, T., F. Aranguen, and R. Brinkmann, 1997, "Lead contamination adjacent to roadways in Trujillo, Venezuela." *Professional Geographer*. 49(3):331-341.

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