

Media Release

Environment Protection Authority



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Nyrstar licence conditions

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) has today finalised variations to the licence conditions for Nyrstar's Port Pirie lead smelter.

The changes to Nyrstar's current licence will ensure new, tougher requirements relating to the operation of the current facility in the short term, as well as requiring a program to assess and develop a satisfactory plan for longer term, more transformational reductions in emissions from the smelter.

According to EPA Deputy Chief Executive Tony Circelli reducing emissions at the plant is not a new activity.

"We recognise the commitment by Nyrstar in achieving a significant reduction in children's blood lead levels and we also acknowledge the reduction in lead emissions achieved through its \$50-million investment in programs such as tenBy10 which over a five-year period reduced the children with blood lead levels above 10 micrograms (μm) per decilitre from 60% to 28%.

"Whilst these has been significant achievements it remains a fact that blood lead levels in some children are still above the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommended blood lead levels," said Mr Circelli.

Since the conclusion of the tenby10 program the EPA has continued to oversee Nyrstar's compliance with current lead emission reduction programs, to ensure that all available measures are in place to reduce current emissions, with existing plant technology, as far as practicably possible.

The current EPA licence has been comprehensively reviewed and additional challenging requirements have been placed on Nyrstar, with the ultimate objective for recommended blood lead levels to be met.

In June a revised environment improvement program (EIP) was developed by Nyrstar and approved by the EPA. Implementation of this plan has commenced and includes improvements to materials handling areas, the sinter plant and blast furnace.

"Achieving NHMRC recommended blood lead levels has always been the goal.

"The variations to Nyrstar's licence will impose in the short term new air quality limits for lead in air at key monitoring sites – Oliver St and Pirie West Primary School – these are enforceable limits that must be met. In addition Nyrstar is required to undertake high volume air sampling at all sites.

"In the longer term Nyrstar will be required to achieve a further substantial reduction in emissions, which is not considered technically possible with the current smelter technology, to ensure that NHMRC recommendations for blood lead levels are met for all Port Pirie residents," said Mr Circelli.

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This forward looking EIP will require Nyrstar to assess international best practice for lead smelting, and to provide timelines and actions to introduce technology and the required process changes and abatement that meet this best practice.

The EIP will require Nyrstar to assess what emission reductions will be achieved by these technologies. The EPA will then assess the Nyrstar proposal and timelines, including using independent expert advisers. The EPA will approve the program if it can demonstrate that NHMRC recommendations for blood lead levels are likely to be met.

Under the varied licence the EPA will have the power to change licence conditions at any time during the licence period (to 2018). This is a unique power for the EPA that has been agreed to by Nyrstar.

“Implementing any new technology and processes at this scale will take careful analysis, development, commissioning and therefore, also, time,” said Mr Circelli.

“The EPA will continue to require everything that is considered reasonable and practicable in order to continue reducing emissions until these longer-term measures are in place.

“We are all committed to working towards the future.”