

# Cross Current



Volume 35, Number 42

November 7, 2010

## FUELLING CONTROVERSY


In the early days of the car, big corporations got a lot of mileage out of leaded gas, even though they knew it was deadly. Victims got a one-way trip to death and disease.

Back then, fuel wasn't burning efficiently so engines were noisy and sluggish. The simplest solution was to add grain alcohol which ran well but was too expensive to be the standard motor fuel. But in 1921, a cheaper alternative was found by Ohio engineer Thomas Midgley. While working for General Motors, he found that engine knock was eliminated by adding to gasoline a small amount of tetra-ethyl lead. The dangers of lead paint were so well known at the time that the League of Nations wanted it banned. But the lead additive was cheaper than grain alcohol so G.M., DuPont and Standard Oil formed the Ethyl Gasoline Company to sell leaded gas.

Soon after, 15 workers died. New York state banned leaded gas in 1924. When public hearings were held, Midgley lied, saying lead was safe and the only way to stop engine knock. He poured leaded gas on his hands and sniffed the fumes, but neglected to tell the press he once suffered from lead poisoning and needed a year off to recuperate.

When authorities said there wasn't enough data to say leaded gas was harmful but needed more study, the product went on sale in 1926. Midgley and the Ethyl Company knew grain alcohol was safer but greed ruled supreme. By 1965, science had proven gas had released harmful levels of lead into the air. In 1970, government forced auto-makers to equip all cars with catalytic converters, which are ruined by lead deposits. Leaded gas was finally banned by 1986 but is still





*Fall: a reminder of  
what was and  
what will be.  
Death: exactly  
the same thing.*

**followers of Christ meet at**  
16 Morrell St., Btfd, ON, N3T 4J2  
*Sharing Jesus and the Journey*

**JOIN US!**  
**Sunday**  
Classes 10:00  
Worship 11:00  
**Wednesday**  
Bible Study 7:00  
Phone 758-5673  
[www.followers.ca](http://www.followers.ca)

widely sold in developing nations. Today, gas is routinely enhanced with the very additive lead replaced in the 1920s — grain alcohol.

As for Midgley, he went on to develop CFCs — chlorofluorocarbons — the refrigeration coolant widely blamed for poking a hole in earth's ozone layer. Some say he had a bigger impact on the atmosphere than anyone in human history. In middle age he contracted polio and suffered partial paralysis. He was strangled to death in 1944 by a rope and pulley machine he designed to help him in and out of bed.

Leaded gas could be used as a metaphor for all the things we add to our lives to make things run smoother and quieter. In the grand scheme of things, we have two choices: the things that are safe and work well but cost us more; or those that are cheaper, easier and promoted by people who know the harm they do but don't care.

That second category has no shortage of culprits. The clearest targets are the cigarette companies who continue to market their lethal product in developing nations where the link to cancer is not widely known; the alcohol industry which says "drink responsibly" while ignoring the health risks and marketing booze as just another drink; and the makers of pornography who exploit and demean women while feeding the fantasies of millions who become moral accomplices.

Add to that list the gambling industry (or gaming industry, as it prefers to be known), Big Pharma — which uses fear and insecurity to sell us more drugs — and advertising as a whole, with its subtle manipulation designed to sell things we don't need and can't afford.

Still, we can't let those common scapegoats blind us to our own responsibility. Anything we add to our lives that detracts from a spiritual focus can be as slowly poisonous as leaded gas, including an overemphasis on friends, money, gadgets, hobbies or the internet. God demands first place in our lives. Anything that takes his place is toxic.

What so many fail to realize is that spirituality is the fuel that drives our inner engine. True and lasting fulfilment comes through adding to our lives those things that will give us more power, purpose and peace of mind: a genuine relationship with Jesus, connection with the Holy Spirit, the direction of God's Word, the encouragement of a loving church family, and selfless, sacrificial service to others. It costs more, but it's worth it. It's time to stop stalling. Get the lead out.

*Rick Gamble*