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Academic attacks public's lax attitude on use of lead

By JAMIE ALLEN

A PROMINENT academic yesterday condemned the "cavalier" attitude displayed towards the use of lead in Hongkong, calling for greater controls of the mineral.

"There are people measuring the lead in the paint on children's toys at the behest of exporters, otherwise they wouldn't be able to export them. But there are no controls for Hongkong," said Dr Bob Keen of the Hongkong Polytechnic's Centre of Environmental Studies.

Dr Keen said lead was a totally unnecessary pollutant and one that could be guarded against. He said Hongkong should follow the exam-

ple of Western countries and ban lead from use.

Dr Keen was speaking after telling a Rotary Club luncheon meeting that the findings of a CES study into lead levels among schoolchildren would be released soon.

The study, which has taken more than a year and was commissioned by the environmental group Friends of the Earth, surveyed children from about 50 schools around Hongkong.

It looked at lead levels in children's hair, baby teeth and in dust on school playgrounds and pavements.

Dr Keen pointed out that the main source of lead in the environment came from petrol fumes, although it was

also used widely in paints, glazes on kitchen crockery, cosmetics and as a filler in some plastic water pipes.

Dr Keen said the Government should introduce statutory controls governing the products using lead.

He said the high-risk groups were children and pregnant women. People with high lead levels in their blood would suffer physical and psychological disorders, he said.

Dr Keen also pointed out that overseas experience had proved that while the banning of lead may initially increase costs to industry, health care savings would balance the cost to the community.