



HEALTH CARE AGENCY/PUBLIC HEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH *INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN*

To: All Businesses Selling Terra Cotta Ceramic Ware from Mexico

Subject: The Sale of Terra Cotta Ceramic Ware from Mexico

This bulletin is to inform you that The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has announced a prohibition on the importation of terra cotta ceramic tableware from Mexico. The glaze used on this ceramic ware has been found to contain high levels of lead. Although these containers may be marked "For Decorative Use Only" or "May Poison Food", they are often found being used for the cooking, storage and serving of foods.

Studies have shown that Mexican folk terra cotta has been a major cause of excessive lead exposure in children of Mexican heritage in the United States. Lead is toxic to humans, especially young children, infants, and fetuses, in both short and long term exposures. Lead can cause damage to the central nervous system, resulting in learning disorders and hyperactivity, as well as other health problems such as muscle weakness, kidney impairment (causing hypertension), bone marrow disorders (leading to a form of anemia), and reproductive harm (resulting in physical and neurologic birth defects, and other developmental abnormalities).

Mexican terra cotta is typically composed of the locally available clay, bears a lead oxide based glaze, and is fired in a rudimentary wood fueled kiln. The effect of this combination of materials and uncontrolled firing conditions leads to a product that has a crude, primitive appearance. These articles are highly porous due to improper firing conditions and leach excessive and variable amounts of lead, sometimes as high as several thousand parts per million (ppm). The California Tableware Safety Law allows 1 ppm lead for large hollowware such as serving bowls and pots and 0.5 ppm for cups, mugs, and pitchers.

Certain characteristics distinguish these items from other types of terra cotta ware. Like other terra cotta, the clay is typically reddish brown or tan. However, the surface of folk terra cotta has a rough glazed surface that is porous to moisture and may be decorated or undecorated. In contrast, the commercial grades of terra cotta tableware have a smooth glass-like glazed finish.

If you have this type of ceramic ware, you are directed to destroy it or to drill holes in it so as to render it incapable of holding a liquid or semi-liquid food. If you have any questions regarding this issue, please contact Environmental Health at (714) 433-6000.

DANGER !!

- Many clay pots contain lead, a poison that can harm your family's health.
- Don't use clay pots for cooking, serving, or storing food.

