

TO: REBECCA WOOLINGTON, TAMPA BAY TIMES

FROM: ERIC ROBINSON, GOPHER RESOURCE

RE: INQUIRIES FROM THE TAMPA BAY TIMES

Dear Ms. Woolington:

We are disappointed with the contents of the email you sent on February 16. The claims within your email include factual and legal inaccuracies and do not provide a balanced perspective. The health and wellbeing of our employees and their families – both past and present – is our top concern, however the assertions in your email are misplaced. The hard work of the entire Gopher Resource team has contributed to a 15-year sustained reduction in employee blood lead levels, a compelling indicator that our health and safety program is effective.

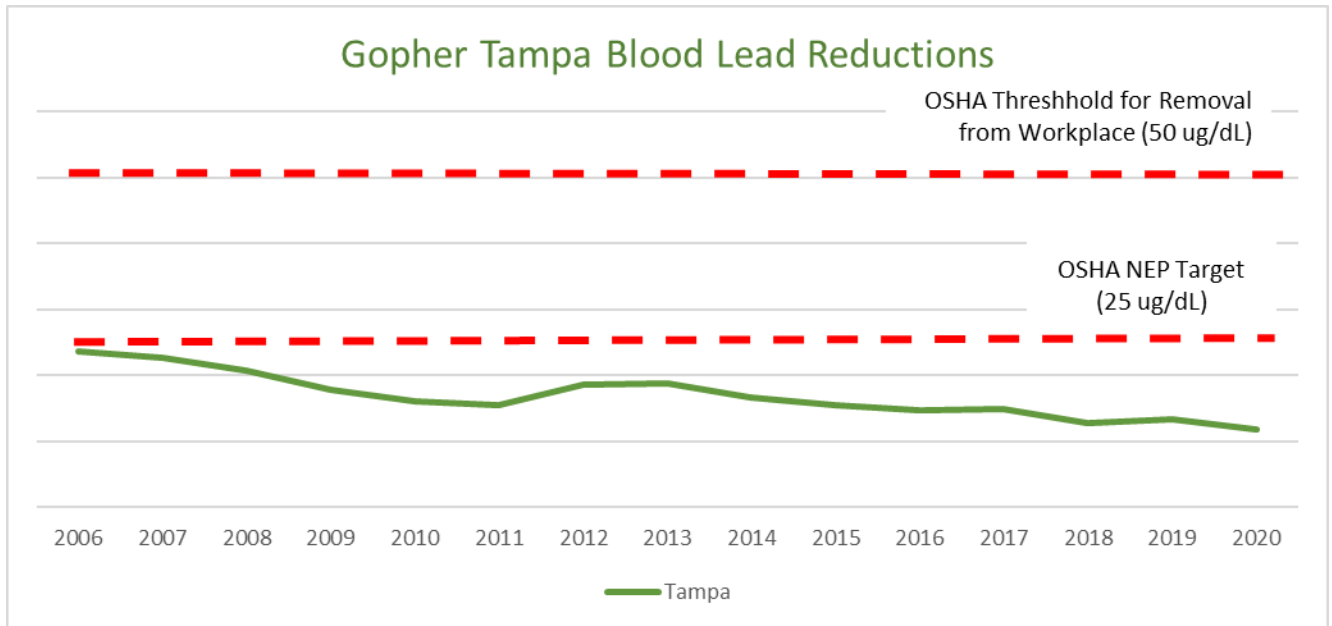
We are proud of the Gopher Resource workforce and of the commitment our plant and our people have to our overriding core value of protecting our employees and our community.

Gopher Resource is a leading provider of recycling services to the battery industry. Our Tampa plant prevents approximately 13 million lead batteries from going into landfills each year. We have invested more than \$230 million to reconstruct and modernize the facility in Tampa. After acquiring the distressed plant in 2006, we rebuilt the entire operation so that it is contained within a negative-pressure enclosure. We also installed state-of-the-art pollution control and health and safety measures that are **more stringent** than regulatory standards.

Below are facts that we believe should be included in your reporting to provide a more full and balanced perspective for your readers.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is the governing body for workplace health and safety, and the recognized authority for employee blood lead levels in our industry. Employee blood lead levels are also the most important measure of the impact of our operations on employee health and safety. As OSHA's data sheet for occupational exposure to lead highlights, the measurement of an employee's blood lead level "is the most useful indicator" of the amount of lead that is absorbed into the body.

Because the entire Gopher Resource workforce has dedicated itself to following our comprehensive health and safety program, as the below chart indicates, **the average blood lead level of employees at our Tampa plant is less than one-fifth the OSHA standard for removal and less than half of the target set by the agency's National Emphasis Program.** Employee blood lead levels have declined consistently since we acquired the Tampa facility, and are now more than 50% lower than in 2006, and among the best in our industry based on this measure.



- Gopher Resource has implemented a comprehensive health and safety program including:
 - o Investments in various types of personal protective equipment
 - o Thousands of hours of safety training per year
 - o State-of-the-art equipment and control technology
 - o Thorough hygiene protocols and training
 - o Personal onsite laundry services
 - o Blood lead management policies that are significantly more rigorous than required by OSHA including testing with twice the frequency as required
 - o Lead-check stations
 - o Separate, clean break uniforms
 - o Separate clean and dirty locker spaces
 - o Mandatory vacuum and boot wash stations
 - o Decontamination/wash stations and shower facilities with de-lead soap
 - o Clean lunch and changing rooms
 - o Workplace cleaning protocols, equipment and supplies
- Our focus on employee lead exposure reduction has been effective in encouraging proper hygiene practices and an instrumental contributor to the significant decrease of employee blood lead levels over time.
- We do not condone and strongly discourage unsafe practices intended to reduce blood lead levels and instead coach employees to practice healthy living measures, such as appropriate hydration and a healthy diet.
- Comments made regarding the SO2 scrubber indicate a lack of understanding of its purpose and position in the process. Our SO2 scrubber is interlocked with furnace operations, making it impossible to operate our furnaces with the SO2 scrubber not operating.
- Due to HIPAA regulations and our ethical standards, we respect the privacy of our employees and their personal medical information and do not discuss or share that information.

- Our preferred approach to collect and remove dust is to use vacuum powered industrial sweepers which is an industry best practice.
- In our experience, OSHA rarely provides advance notice on inspections, which eliminates the ability to prepare for these visits. Gopher Resource operates under a policy of open and transparent communication as required to appropriate regulatory agencies.

Finally, we want to address what we find to be the most distressing of your claims, and that is the insinuation that Gopher Resource is the “source of lead exposure in at least 16 children of Gopher workers.” We take very seriously any allegations of family impacts, especially if children are involved. It is our understanding that the Department of Health is notified when any child has tests that confirm dangerous levels of lead in their blood and thoroughly investigates potential sources of lead including the occupation of parents and relatives. **We are not aware of any child of any employee in our Tampa plant who has been identified by the Department of Health or confirmed through intravenous blood testing as having an unsafe level of lead in their blood attributable to our operations.** It would be misleading for your reporting to suggest otherwise.

As members of the community served by your publication, we remain disappointed by the incomplete and in many cases, inaccurate viewpoints expressed in your email. At a minimum, we hope that your reporting will include that **(1) we are proud of our employees’ commitment to safety and achievement in sustaining a consistent reduction of blood lead levels by more than 50% over the last 15 years, and (2) the average blood lead level of our Tampa plant employees is less than one-fifth the OSHA standard for removal and less than half of the target set by the agency’s National Emphasis Program.**