

DRAFT

**FULLY LEADED:
Work, Bodies, and Environment in
Three Rocky Mountain Smelter Communities**

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My dissertation will focus primarily on the connection between lead and health in Idaho's Silver Valley region (Kellogg, Wallace, etc.) from 1917 to the present. From 1917, when the Bunker Hill and Sullivan Company constructed its lead smelter, through 1981, when the Gulf and Western Resources Company (which purchased Bunker Hill in 1969) closed the smelter, the Silver Valley was one of the world's great lead-producing and lead-smelting areas. During that time period, however, medical and public attitudes toward the dangers associated with lead shifted dramatically. My dissertation will examine how, and to what extent (if at all) these shifts in perception were registered by different interests in the Silver Valley, from housewives living near the smelter to Bunker Hill executives living thirty miles west in Couer D'Alene and from smelter workers to local doctors and nurses. My work will not only concern itself with the social history of the perception of the dangers of lead, but also with such tangible evidence as can be gathered of actual harm done to human health and to the health of the plant and wildlife and the water and air of the Silver Valley. Highly increased emissions of airborne lead particulate following the smelter's "baghouse fire" in late 1973, lasting for several months, led to federal and state testing of the blood-lead levels of many Silver Valley children over the next several years. A great deal of health data was produced due to heightened concerns regarding possible threats to human health in the wake of the baghouse fire. I plan on using this "hard data" as a critical resource in the writing on my dissertation. Another useful resource will be Idaho and federal (mainly EPA) records that detail the impact of nearly a century of mining, and 65 years of smelting, on the ecology of the Silver Valley, nearly all of which has been considered a federal Superfund site since the early 1980s.