



**BY BOB HOLT**

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During the discussions about gun control and how to reduce violent crime across the nation, there is one theory that has been overlooked: Lead.

According to a study, leaded gasoline may be the cause of as much as 90 percent of the variations in violent crime over the past 50 years.

Leaded gasoline began to appear in the early 1940s, and lead emissions from cars quadrupled. Those emissions dropped as unleaded fuel began being used in the 1970s. Violent crime rates followed a similar pattern, but about 20 years afterward.

Mother Jones [reported](#) that research in 2000 by former U.S. Housing and Urban Development consultant Rick Nevin showed that children who ingested high levels of lead in the '40s and '50s were more likely to become violent criminals in the '60s, '70s, and '80s.

Tulane University toxicologist Howard Mielke studied six cities- Atlanta, Chicago, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, New Orleans, and San Diego – and found that every one percent increase in the metric tons of lead emitted from a car's exhaust resulted in 1.59 more aggravated assaults per 100,000 people, [according](#) to Business Standard.

Dr Alastair Hay, a professor at Leeds University, said, [according](#) to Mail Online, “We know that lead exposure in children and infants damages the brain, and children who are exposed to lead have a lower IQ. What these studies are saying is that following exposure in infancy the effect on the body seems to predispose, or is certainly strongly linked, with violent behavior in adulthood.”

"Ten years ago the evidence wasn't all that solid," Mother Jones writer Kevin Drum [said](#) to The Huffington Post. "Now the evidence is really strong. Criminologists should be taking it seriously."

Drum said research he's seen indicates that lead is responsible for about 40 to 50 percent of violent crimes over the last half-century. [According](#) to Mother Jones, he estimated that for about \$20 billion a year for 20 years we could clean up all the remaining lead, and see a 10 percent drop in crime that could be worth up to \$150 billion each year.