Lead-Based Paint SafetyTalk



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Lead-based paint is a dangerous source of lead but precautions can be taken to reduce exposure. Removing, repairing or disturbing lead paint through normal wear-and-tear such as paint on doors, windows, stairs and railings can expose you and your family to health risks.

Medical and scientific research shows that absorption of even very low levels of lead into the blood may have harmful health effects on the intellectual and behavioural development of infants and young children.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Exposure to lead-based paint usually occurs from ingestion. Lead-based paint does not present a health hazard as long as the paint is not chipping, flaking, crushed or sanded into dust.

Low levels of exposure to lead can cause health effects such as learning disabilities and behavioural problems in children. High levels of exposure to lead may cause lead poisoning and other issues such as anemia and impaired brain and nervous system functions.

Currently there is no known safe level of lead exposure and no known safe blood lead concentration. However, as lead exposure increases, the range and severity of symptoms and effects also increases.

While the public's exposure to lead has decreased over the years, lead can still be a problem. It is important to be aware of lead sources so you can minimize your health risks.

Lead paint is still present in millions of homes, sometimes under layers of newer paint. Deteriorating lead-based paint (peeling, chipping, chalking, cracking, damaged, or damp) is a hazard and needs immediate attention.

Lead-based paint may also be a hazard when found on surfaces that children can chew or that get a lot of wear-and-tear, such as:

- Windows and window sills;

- Doors and door frames; and
- Stairs, railings, banisters, and porches.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Lead-based paint is most likely to be found on window frames, doors, skirting boards, kitchen and bathroom cupboards, exterior walls, gutters, metal surfaces and fascias on homes or structures built before 1970, or even interior walls.

Sometimes lead-based paint may be covered by more recently applied paint and becomes a workplace health and safety issue when the paint deteriorates and becomes powdery or flaky during paint removal.

- Test all surfaces and layers of paint to be removed to determine if the paint contains lead as lead-based paint cannot be identified by its appearance.
- A simple test kit available from some paint manufacturers and distributors can determine the presence of lead-based paint. Carefully read the manufacturer’s instructions before using the test kit.
- Test kits can give false results, so if the swab gives a negative reading, but the age of the house indicates that lead-based paint could have been used, assume that lead-based paint is present or have the paint tested by a laboratory. Some analytical laboratories can provide a precise analysis of lead presence and its concentration.

Removal Alternatives

If paint is in good condition there may be no need to remove it unless major renovation and comprehensive removal is planned. However, lead-based paint should be removed from areas that are likely to be chewed or licked by children, knocked or subject to friction.

ALTERNATIVES TO PAINT REMOVAL INCLUDE:

Painting Over Lead-Based Paint

- Only paint over lead-based paint if surfaces are in good condition. If the paint is flaking or chalking, prepare the surface by a light wet sanding with wet-and-dry sandpaper to help the paint stick to the surface. Take care not to generate lead dust or contaminate the area with water from the wet-sanding process.
- Painting over the paint is a temporary solution limited by the life of the paint.

Covering Lead-Based Paint with Other Materials

- Cover lead-based paint on exterior surfaces with durable materials, such as aluminum cladding or weatherboard and thoroughly seal all gaps.
- Cover internal surfaces with durable materials that will not tear, chip or peel. These include plasterboard, vinyl wall coverings, wood paneling and floor coverings such as carpet, tiles or vinyl.

SAFE REMOVAL METHODS

If you have decided to remove the paint, choose a safe removal method. Different

ways of removing lead paint create different risks to health, which need to be properly controlled.

- Wet Scraping
- Chemical Strippers
- Wet Hand Sanding
- Low-Temperature Heat Processes

CLEANING THE SITE

- Remain in protective clothing, including gloves and respirator when cleaning the site.
- Place large disposable items including the plastic sheet and other debris into tough plastic bags.
- Vacuum all surfaces including the tarpaulin used for exterior work with a suitable commercial vacuum cleaner fitted with a HEPA filter.
- Wet-clean hard surfaces using a carpet steam cleaner or by wet mopping several times. Put dust into tough sealable plastic bags. Alternatively, some contract cleaning services offer an effective chemical method of removing lead dust.
- Do not use a broom, compressed air or a vacuum cleaner without a HEPA filter as it will spread lead dust.
- Use a spray bottle to wet down all dust and debris lying on the plastic sheeting before taking them up.
- Wipe down all surfaces in the work areas with a damp cloth.
- Wash the area with 25 grams of 5% trisodium phosphate (TSP) in five litres of hot water or sugar soap. Renew the solution frequently to prevent it becoming contaminated.
- Dispose of cloths and mops to avoid spreading lead dust during cleaning.
- Vacuum dry surfaces such as skirting boards, architraves, window sills, casings, shelves and counter-tops until no dust or residue remains.
- Dampen dusty outside areas with spray from a garden hose and sweep and collect debris. Avoid dry sweeping since it spreads lead dust.
- Shovel paint debris into heavy duty plastic bags.
- Remove the top layer of contaminated soil and put into tough sealable plastic bags.
- Clean tools with TSP solution or sugar soap.
- Clean respirators after use and store them in a container away from the lead source.
- Remove contaminated clothing before leaving the work area and place clothes in a plastic bag until washed.
- Clean up the site frequently throughout the day and vacuum at the end of each day.

DISPOSING OF LEAD CONTAMINATED WASTE

- Place lead-containing debris into deflated heavy duty plastic bags and seal them.
- Pour lead-contaminated water generated as a result of wet scraping or sanding, or during clean-up, into a strong, securely sealed container.
- Provide short-term secure storage.
- Transport debris and solid waste materials containing lead to waste systems.
- Check with the waste management section of the local council about proper

waste disposal.
- Ensure that all bulky items are covered during transportation.

FINAL WORD

It is incumbent for families to understand that absorption of low levels of lead into the blood have significant deleterious affects. At higher risk are our most vulnerable: infants, children and pregnant women.