



Lead Paint: Know the Rules

Lead has a long history as an additive to gasoline and paint. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began phasing out leaded gas in 1973 (a process that took 20 years), and lead additives in paint were banned in 1978. Lead was added to paint for color and durability, and was also added to some stains and varnishes.

Exposure to lead can lead to permanent neurological damage, especially in small children. It has been linked to behavior problems, nerve and kidney damage, hearing loss, and headaches. In adults, it can contribute to high blood pressure, reproductive problems, memory and concentration problems, and muscle and joint pain.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), the percentage of children under six years old who had elevated blood lead levels dropped from eight percent in 1997 to one percent in 2007.

Do You Have Lead Paint?

Some states banned the use of lead paint prior to the federal ban. Most manufacturers voluntarily stopped using lead prior to the ban. If your home was built on or before December 31, 1977, it is considered "at risk" of having lead paint.



EPA-approved instant lead testing swabs can be purchased at most home improvement stores, and are a quick way for homeowners to check whether their homes have exposed lead

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However, just because your house was built after 1978 doesn't mean lead paint can't still be a problem. Because lead paint had exceptional durability, many painters stocked up on it before the ban went into effect. Manufacturers were not required to destroy their existing supplies, so lead paint continued to be sold and used for years afterward. It is not unusual for houses built in the 1980s or even later to still test positive for lead paint. The only way to be sure one way or the other is to test the painted surfaces, both interior and exterior.

It's Not Just Paint Chips

Contrary to popular belief, the biggest danger of lead poisoning does not come from eating paint chips. Instead, it is the constant exposure to dust from disturbed lead paint. Lead paint dust is an issue because you can't see it, it's hard to sweep up, and it travels. Just one gram of lead-based paint can contaminate a large area. Even a floor that looks clean can have lead-containing dust on it if lead paint has been disturbed on the property. Once dust is released, it can easily be tracked inside and outside a property. A child crawling or playing on the floor will pick up the dust on his hands, which can then be ingested when he puts his hands in his mouth.

Contractor Certification Requirements

In April 2010, the EPA enacted new regulations regarding lead paint abatement. These new rules state that contractors working in pre-1978 homes must be certified and use lead-safe work practices during renovations.

To become certified, contractors must attend an EPA-approved training course, and keep complete records of all steps taken during a renovation involving lead paint.

It is the contractor's responsibility to test for lead paint in the areas that will be disturbed, and to follow approved testing methods. These test involved EPA-recognized test kits (usually small chemical swabs), and are more involved than just dabbing the swab on the suspected area. The regulation also stipulates that an EPA-certified renovator be present on the job site to perform or direct the work and document the process to verify that lead-safe practices were followed.

Failure to comply with these regulations can result in hefty fines (\$37,500 per violation) or even jail time.

For More Information:

EPA: Lead in Paint, Dust and Sand:
epa.gov/lead



Your contractor should have a certificate similar to the one pictured above. It will have the contractor's name and photograph, the exam date, and the expiration date, along with the entity offering the class and the name of the class.