

# Law fights lead paint hazards

Starting Dec. 6, 1996, the sale and rental of housing built before 1978 will be affected by a new lead paint hazard disclosure law. Realtors and landlords are gearing up to comply with the rules, which require that buyers and renters be informed of the potential for lead paint safety concerns.

The new law requires that known lead-based paint hazards be disclosed, and gives home buyers a 10-day period to conduct a lead-based paint inspection or risk assessment at their own expense. Buyers and renters must both be provided with an EPA pamphlet entitled, "Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home." This pamphlet is available from local Realtors, the EPA or the AmeriSpec home inspection service in Plymouth.

Lead has been banned from household paint, toys and playground equipment since 1978, thus the law only affects housing built prior to this date. Generally speaking, the older the home is, the more likely it is to have lead-based paint. The EPA reports that for homes built between 1960 and 1979, 49 percent of housing had interior lead-based paint contrasted to 69 percent of homes built between 1940 and 1959 and 83 percent of those built before 1940.

The numbers are larger for exterior surfaces.

## Dangers

Lead can cause brain damage, learning disabilities, nerve disorders, hearing problems and reproductive concerns including fetal damage. Adults as well as children can suffer health risks from lead poisoning but children are most at risk. The new rules were promulgated because nearly 2 million children (nearly one in 11 youngsters), in rural areas, inner cities and suburbs are thought to be affected by lead poisoning.

The number of poisonings, and the severity of poisonings, are down from earlier years due to limits placed on the use of lead and greater public education. Requiring disclosure of known lead hazards and further educating the public as to how to respond to the presence of lead-based paint significantly reduce the number of cases of lead poisoning.

Lead is most problematic for children under 6, because they are most likely to put their hands or other objects covered with lead dust or paint in their mouths and because their brains and nervous systems can be more easily damaged by lead. The greatest risk of lead poisoning

appears to occur during the time that small children are crawling.

## Be aware

The mere presence of lead paint in a household, fortunately, isn't an automatic hazard. Intact paint can be maintained in safe condition.

First, one has to be aware of the most likely trouble spots. Things to be wary of include deteriorated paint and areas subject to friction such as window tracks, floors and door frames. Also of concern are lead-based paint surfaces that are subject to ongoing impact such as painted doors, baseboards and other trim.

Household dust and soil can be a significant area of contamination. Bare soil can contain lead from peeling paint at siding and windows and often contains contamination from the days of leaded gasoline. Another significant contributor to lead ingestion are renovations in which paint surfaces are disturbed and made airborne.

Agencies such as the EPA and the National Center for Lead-safe Housing provide tips for safe paint practices and lead-safe cleaning for repair jobs likely to produce lead dust.

They specifically recommend against

such practices as open flame burning or torching, machine or abrasive sanding or grinding without special vacuum tools, and heat guns that operate above 1100 degrees Fahrenheit. Each of these practices can either add to a problem or create one that didn't previously exist. Further, they recommend that any pre-1978 home be considered to have lead paint until or unless testing is performed.

In our next column, we will examine three programs that help determine the risk of lead-based paint. Lead-based paint inspections and risk assessments are two specific tools that require EPA training and certification. A lead survey has also been developed by the National Center for Lead-safe Housing. Each tool has a specific purpose in mind and each has specific protocols for its performance. Watch for the next column for more in depth information on these options.

*Around the House*, by the AmeriSpec home inspection service, 1378 S. Main in Plymouth, instructs homeowners about the basics of home maintenance and repair. If you have a question, write to: *Around the House/At Home*, The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

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