

Lead-Based Paint

Exposure

Lead-based paints were used in many homes prior to its banning by the federal government in 1978. Lead-based paints, as the name implies, contains lead. Many documented cases of lead poisoning can be attributed to lead contamination resulting from the degradation of such paints. Lead-based paints in good condition pose little risk but those that begin to peel, chip, chalk, or crack do pose a health risk.

As lead-based paint products degrade lead can be released into the surrounding environment in the form of dust. Lead dust can also be formed and become airborne when lead-based paint is sanded or scrapped. Painted surfaces when rubbed together can also produce lead dust. The lead dust can settle and then become airborne again when disturbed by sweeping, vacuuming, or just walking through a contaminated area. Chips of paint flaking off of exterior surfaces can even cause ground contamination.

Health Risks

Lead poisoning can occur when lead is ingested if inhaled and the concentration of lead in the body will grow over time with continued exposure. Physical symptoms of lead poisoning in children can include: damage to the brain and nervous system, behavior and learning problems, slowed physical development, hearing problems, and chronic headaches. Adults are also affected and can have: difficulties during pregnancy, reproductive problems, high blood pressure, digestive problems, nerve disorders, memory and concentration problems, muscle and joint pain.

Dealing with Lead-Based Paints in Your Home

It is sometimes better to just assume that if your home was build prior to 1980 that is contains lead based paints (Even though lead-based paints were banned in 1978, it is certain that some builders and paint supplies continued to sell and use existing stocks beyond that date). The Housing and Urban Development department of the federal government (HUD) has a 16 page brochure giving tips on dealing with lead paint.