

## Poisoned Paint

**THE USE** OF lead-based paint has been banned for three decades. Yet more than 38 million homes in this country are estimated still to be contaminated with lead paint, which can cause significant health problems, particularly in children.

Almost one million children under age six suffer from lead poisoning, which can cause permanent brain damage.

So how can you tell if your house or building has lead paint? How do you find a contractor who can safely eliminate the health risk? Can you afford it? Before planning your next maintenance project, you should know the answers to these questions.

To raise awareness of the health risk, the week of Oct. 19 is designated National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Lead paint was used commonly in homes before 1978, when the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission banned its use.

Homeowners aren't required to remove lead paint since it poses no immediate risk. However, when lead paint is peeling or disturbed during renovations, it should be removed immediately, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Lead enters the body mainly through inhalation and ingestion. Signs of lead poisoning may include fatigue, sleep problems, irritability and headaches. Many of the symptoms are commonly misdiagnosed as the flu. Children and pregnant women have the greatest risk of permanent health damage. Lead dust settles on floors and walls where it can get on children's hands or toys and into their mouths.

### TESTING METHODS

There are three ways to test for lead in paint, but only one can be done by the homeowner. The other two require professional testing services. The most common method is X-ray fluorescence (XRF) in which a handheld device is used to determine the presence and quantity of lead. XRF is the preferred method for residential work because many measurements can be taken in a short time with no damage to the surface being tested.

The second method is a paint chip analysis. Paint chips must be sent to a certified testing laboratory and analyzed for total lead content. Results from each of these methods should be compared to the acceptable ranges established by HUD and discussed with a certified industrial hygienist.

Homeowners can test using swabs that change color in the presence of paint containing lead. Lead-testing kits are sold at home improvement stores and on the Internet. While this test isn't as accurate as the other two methods and can't provide a quantitative analysis, it is an inexpensive way to determine if professional testing is needed.

Homeowners shouldn't try to remove lead paint themselves, the Consumer Product Safety Commission warns. It should be removed only by professionals trained to remove hazardous materials. Grinding, sanding or scraping can produce lead dust, which can be suspended in the air for some time. Once it lands on a surface, the area must be cleaned sufficiently or it may become contaminated. Typical contaminated areas include floors, window sills, window wells



and the soil just outside the house. Since the dust can be airborne, the lead may contaminate your neighbor's property or even public property. This can leave you vulnerable to lawsuits, which your insurance may not cover.

### TREATMENT CHOICES

Once you determine you have lead-paint contamination, you have three options: abatement, encapsulation or repainting.

Abatement is the removal and disposal of all lead paint. Typically, the work is done using a chemical stripper and power tools with a HEPA vacuum attachment. The work area should be sealed off with heavy plastic to contain the lead-contaminated waste and dust.

Encapsulation uses a specially approved coating applied to surfaces covered in lead paint. This product meets federal standards and is warranted by the manufacturer to seal the lead paint for at least 20 years. In most states, contractors must choose from state-approved encapsulants.

Repainting in a lead-safe manner is the most common and typically least expensive option. This can only be done before the state or municipality determines the lead paint is dangerous to the occupants. A contractor must protect

the workers, the public and the environment from the dangers of the lead paint.

Cost is usually a key factor in deciding on the treatment. Abatement, or removal, is the most expensive treatment. It can cost three times as much as repainting, while encapsulation can cost double the amount. The higher cost is primarily due to the need to contain the area, collect dust and hire licensed contractors with lead-pollution insurance and HEPA vacuum equipment.

Also, in deciding on a treatment, you should consider your liability if the job isn't done correctly. For example, if your home is next to a playground or a day-care facility, the risk of contaminating a sensitive area is high. The chance of being sued may convince you to remove the hazard once and for all.

Your situation should be discussed with your contractor and a certified industrial hygienist so you can make an informed decision on how to proceed.

## HIRING A CONTRACTOR

In choosing a qualified contractor to remove or treat lead paint, price should not be the only consideration. Some states require the use of licensed contractors, supervisors and workers to perform lead abatement and encapsulation. Some states set guidelines for repainting in a lead-safe manner. Contact your local health department for more information.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is mandating stricter training for contractors and their workers beginning in 2010. Until then, look for a contractor who meets federal OSHA standards. Your contractor also should have lead pollution insurance and should name you as an additional insured. Many general liability insurance policies exclude pollution from lead.

Make sure your contractor has a lead health and safety plan. This plan will prove to you that your contractor knows the hazards and is responsible in dealing

with any problems that arise.

Finally, develop a written work plan to cover the details of the job. This should include methods for lead-paint removal, dust suppression, worker protection and waste disposal.

Lead poisoning is more common than you may think. A recent episode of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" featured a Rhode Island foster family, who learned their children have lead poisoning. Dust from lead-based paint on the home's exterior had deposited in the soil in their backyard, where the children play. It's frightening to know that an invisible toxin could be harming you and your family. **cg**

SAMUEL B. SCATURRO is the operations manager at Alpine Painting & Sandblasting Contractors in Paterson, N.J. He is certified by the Society of Protective Coatings as a Protective Coatings Specialist and Lead Abatement Supervisor and also is a NACE-certified Coatings Inspector. For more information, visit [www.alpinepainting.com](http://www.alpinepainting.com).

## CLEAR AS BLACK AND WHITE

We provide **LOW COST** Payment Books, Billing Statements and Checks

### PAYMENT BOOKS & STATEMENTS

#### FAST Turnaround!

We provide job turnaround of 1-5 business days, depending upon specific client requirements.

#### OUTSTANDING Customer Service!

We take pride in providing the **BEST** Customer service available in the industry!

**LOW COST.** We're confident that our pricing is low enough to make it worth your while to switch vendors, period!

### Low Cost CHECKS for your Business

Computer Laser Checks are available for over 300 software programs!

What are you currently paying for your checks?

You could be saving over 50%!!

For a **NO OBLIGATION** Sample Packet with pricing call us at 800-445-3913 or **CLICK** to our Website!

See us online at  
**bank-a-count.com**



**Bank-A-Count Corporation**  
1666 Main St PO Box 167  
Rudolph WI 54475-0167