

## **Dangers in Older Buildings – Get the Lead Out** **by Marjorie Xavier - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

About three-quarters of the nation's housing stock built before 1978 contains some lead-based paint. When properly maintained and managed, this paint poses little risk. If improperly managed, chips and dust from this paint can create a health hazard. It is estimated that more than 400,000 children in the United States have blood-lead levels above safe limits.

***The older the building, the more likely it is to contain lead-based paint.***

***Working on painted surfaces can expose the worker and the residents to lead.***

Lead can affect anyone, but children ages 6 and younger and pregnant women face special hazards. Even exposure to low levels of lead can permanently affect children. Lead can cause damage to the nervous system, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, decreased intelligence, and decreased muscle and bone growth.

Residences built after 1978 should not contain lead-based paint since lead-based paint was banned for use in residential housing in 1978, however, a residence built before 1978 is likely to have surfaces painted with lead-based paint. The older the building, the more likely it is to contain lead-based paint. Working on painted surfaces can expose the worker and the residents to lead. Even if the lead-based paint has been covered with new paint or another covering, cracked or chipped painted surfaces can expose the lead-based paint, possibly creating a lead hazard. Dry sanding, scraping, or blasting lead-based paint can produce dust and paint chips. Burning lead-based paint with open flame torches to make it easier to strip is especially dangerous.

The fumes from the hot paint contain lead and volatile chemicals that are poisonous when inhaled. To be sure that you are not dealing with lead-based paint have the paint tested by a qualified professional. To find an inspector, call 1-888-LEADLIST.

EPA has developed standards to help identify lead hazards in residential paint, dust, and soil. These hazards may be paint chips, lead in household dust, child-accessible or mouthable painted surfaces, friction surfaces of windows and doors, and lead in residential soil. Standards can be viewed at EPA's website at [www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead).

For remodeling or renovating work, use a remodeling professional who has training, experience, and certification in dealing with the hazards of remodeling or renovating homes with lead-based paint. To find a remodeling professional call 1-888-LEADLIST. If you are going to do the work yourself, see EPA's booklet, **Reducing *Lead Hazards When Remodeling Your Home***, available from the National Lead Information Center at 800-424-5323 or at the EPA Lead Website at [www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead).

The most common household lead hazards are deteriorated lead-based paint, lead dust, and contaminated soil. Lead-based paint is a hazard if it is peeling, chipping, or cracking. Lead-based paint that is in good condition is not a hazard if it is not disturbed.

Dust can become contaminated with lead when lead-based paint is dry-scraped or sanded. Dust can also become contaminated when painted surfaces bump or rub together. Lead chips and dust can gather on surfaces and objects that people touch or that children put into their mouths. Clean floors, window frames, window sills, and other surfaces weekly with a solution of water and an all-purpose cleaner. Clean up any lead chips with a wet paper towel. Repair chipped surfaces by spraying with water to reduce dust.

Soil can become contaminated when exterior lead-based paint flakes or peels and gets into the soil. Soil near roadways may also be contaminated from past use of leaded gasoline in cars. Avoid these areas for children's play areas or when planting vegetable gardens.

Older plumbing fixtures, such as faucets, lead pipes, and pipes connected with lead solder can contaminate drinking water. Contact your local water department for testing information or EPA at 415-972-3550.

Some imported, non-glossy, vinyl mini-blinds can be a lead hazard, especially to young children. Sunlight and heat can break down the blinds and may release lead-contaminated dust.

It is best to remove these blinds if you have children who are 6 or younger. If you purchase new mini-blinds, look for products with labels that say, "No lead added."

Keeping a residence in good condition with well-maintained painted surfaces and careful repair and remodeling procedures can protect children. In most cases, lead-based paint that is in good condition is not a hazard.

*For more information on lead hazards, call the National Lead Information Center at 800-424-5323 for lead hazard booklets or see the U.S. EPA Lead Website at [www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead) or call U.S. EPA at 415-947-4164.*