



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

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New Lead Paint Prevention Rule Protects Our Kids

by Karen Timberlake, Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Widespread use of lead-based paint in older housing throughout Wisconsin has poisoned more than 46,000 Wisconsin children since 1996. More than 1,000 Wisconsin kids are reported each year with newly diagnosed lead-poisoning. Although the use of lead in house paints was prohibited in 1978, high lead levels remain in the paint of many homes, particularly those built before 1950.

The changes will help to prevent lead poisoning, which creates very serious medical and behavioral problems. Lead interferes with a child's normal brain development, resulting in lower IQ and behavior problems like aggression and hyperactivity. Lead exposure is a strong predictor of school disciplinary problems, delinquency and adult criminal behavior. It can also be fatal.

Children are most commonly poisoned by lead from lead-based paint dust or chips created by weathering or renovation in older homes. Tragically, some children are poisoned when contractors or homeowners try to remove old paint without using safe methods.

A new federal and state rule went into effect this month to make sure that workers who disturb painted surfaces in older homes don't contaminate homes with dangerous lead dust. All contractors must now be trained and certified in lead-safe renovation, and adopt lead-safe work practices when working in older buildings. This rule applies to renovation projects that disturb paint in residential properties and child-occupied facilities, including child care facilities and schools, built before 1978.

The Department of Health Services has reached out vigorously to Wisconsin's many contractors to explain the changes and has worked closely with contractor groups such as the Wisconsin Builder's Association and the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. The vast majority of contractors have responded positively, and they are well on their way to being prepared for these new requirements.

In fact, many contractors already follow similar procedures, because they are professionals who want to work cleanly and efficiently. The new procedures, such as making sure a finished construction project is left clean, simply make good business sense.

Wisconsin taxpayers, businesses, health insurers and families must bear the costs to Wisconsin residents for medical treatment, special education, juvenile justice, and future loss of earnings due to lead poisoning. Safe renovation practices pay off in avoided health care, special education and social costs as well as knowing each child can achieve their highest potential.

Consumers can identify certified contractors in their community by either calling (608) 261-6876 or by consulting an on-line directory at <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/lead/CompanyList/index.htm>

Homeowners, contractors, rental/property owners/managers and others can learn more about the new Lead-Safe Renovation regulations and program at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/lead.

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