

## Get the lead out

New abatement rules now in effect

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Get the lead out. That's what contractors must do starting April 22 or risk \$37,500-a-day fines.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's new Renovation, Repair and Painting rule requires lead containment certification for anyone paid to disturb more than six feet indoors or 20 feet outdoors on a pre-1978 dwelling or facility where a child spends at least 6 hours per week.

"Now when you have to scrape paint off someone's house that's prior to 1978, and if the chips of paint are going to be going all over the place, you have to have the proper way of disposing of it," says Cal Zarch of Cal's Repair Service based in Albany. "It's like someone taking asbestos out of your house."

The eight-hour course costs \$100 to \$800. It's good for five years. "It's going to be very interesting, because I can't believe that the majority of backyard painters and contractors are going to deal with it," Zarch says. "Everybody does something until they get caught, I guess. Once the general public is aware of it, there will be people policing it — your neighbor across the way — just as if you were going to build a shed without a permit."

Competitive contractors are also expected to enforce the rule, says Jimmy Jones, division manager of Champion Windows in Albany. "If I'm doing it by the book, it's going to cost me more," he says. "If somebody else isn't, I'm going to turn them in."

If followed, the law will go a long way toward protecting children, says Albany attorney Peter Danziger, who specializes in lead litigation. Over the past 15 years, his firm, O'Connell and Aronowitz, has won more than \$60 million for lead-poisoned children. "This puts more obligation on owners and contractors to properly handle lead hazard remediation," he says. "There are still too many getting poisoned for something that's 100 percent preventable."

Lead lowers children's intelligence quotients. It causes attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, aggression, headaches, appetite loss, fatigue and organ damage. Because they're smaller and still developing, unborn babies and kids under 6 are most susceptible.

Lead in water conduits and cooking vessels contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire, historians say. In America, gas, glass and paint contained the malleable, non-corrosive element until a 1978 government ban. Recently, the heavy metal turned up in toys and jewelry imported from Asia.

In New York state, there are millions of dwellings built before 1978 and thousands of children diagnosed with lead toxicity each year. Albany, Schenectady and Rensselaer have some of the highest lead poisoning rates in the state because of their old housing stock, says Danziger. Although it strikes low-income minority tenants hardest, do-it-yourself homeowners can poison their children and themselves if they don't wear masks and take precautions, Danziger says. "If an owner or contractor merely went in and scraped off old paint, chips and dust would be spread throughout the apartment," he says. "The children and adults would be poisoned."

Patrick E. Strodel teaches contractors how to comply with the new EPA regulations. The client should see the contractor's certification, sign off on it, and receive a "renovate right" pamphlet, he says. Contractors should test the materials to be disturbed for lead, cover the floor with plastic, mist surfaces with a spray bottle and score baseboards with a utility knife before prying them off so there is a clean break.

Workers should use warning signs and barriers to keep dust in and unauthorized people out. They should also wear disposable booties over their shoes or change footwear before leaving the work area. The final step is the white glove test. Wipe the windowsill with a disposable cloth. If it's darker than the special reference card, more clean-up is in order. "You vacuum," says Strodel. "Then, you wipe it down using water with surfactant like soap. Any good detergent will work. Then, you vacuum again."

Even if you're not refurbishing, if your home predates 1978, you should frequently wash hands and toys, mop floors and wipe windowsills with a damp cloth. You should also demand repeated blood lead screening tests from your doctor.

In children, a blood lead level above 10 deciliters is considered elevated. At 15 deciliters, the county health department inspects for lead paint. Danziger typically deals with levels in the 20s and the 30s. The highest he has encountered exceeded 100. "Usually, at a level in the 40s, a child will go to the hospital to have chelation to try and remove the lead from the body, but it's not a cure," he says. "Lead is stored in a child's bones for years and the lead keeps coming out into the blood and poisoning the child. The problem is it's not taken as seriously as it should be."

Only a third of New York's children receive all required screenings. By law, doctors must test blood lead levels within the first two years of life. Any child spending significant time in an older building should be tested every well child visit. "Adults also get poisoned by lead, severely poisoned," Danziger says.

Dr. Ronald Stram treats lead-poisoned grown-ups at the Center for Integrative Health and Healing in Bethlehem. "We have some people here who work remodeling old homes in Albany," he says. "They have a pretty high exposure."

Lead creates the chronic abdominal pain of painter's colic, he says. In adults, it causes muscle twitching, brain fog, memory and coordination loss and joint pain. Other symptoms include numbness, tingling, fatigue, insomnia, slurred speech, pallor or blue-black gums. Lead poisoning can go undetected for years. The acceptable adult blood lead level is under 25 micrograms per deciliter, but blood tests are deceptive, Stram says. "It's stored in the bones teeth, liver and other places that are not readily available from blood testing," he says.

That's why integrative physicians use non-routine blood or urine tests. Sometimes, they prescribe chelating agents to purge the lead. It's a little like dragging a giant magnet through your system. Clinically, chelation has been shown to improve symptoms, but it's controversial. "It is rejected by the typical medical community, including the American Medical Association, Stram says.