



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



It's Renovation Season: Use Lead-Safe Work Practices in Pre-1978 Buildings



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MONTPELIER – A former legislator who is now leader of the Vermont Association of General Contractors has an in-depth understanding of the importance of lead-safe renovation practices to prevent lead poisoning.

“The need for safe stabilization or abatement of lead on our construction and renovation projects is imperative,” said Cathy Voyer Lambertson, chief executive officer of the 140-member contractor trade association in Montpelier. “It protects the overall health of our workers and Vermont’s youth as well.”

The Health Department is working to raise awareness both among contractors and homeowners about the need to use safe work practices when renovating buildings and homes built before 1978, the year lead paint was banned.

Contractors are required to comply with lead-safe work practices and state and federal lead laws, including Vermont’s Essential Maintenance Practices (EMP) law, and the EPA’s lead renovation, repair and painting rule. Lead is a highly toxic metal commonly found in paint, solder, brass and soil. Vermont has one of the oldest housing stocks in the nation, and housing built before 1978 probably has some lead paint.

“Reducing the number of children and workers who have elevated blood lead levels are Healthy Vermonters 2020 goals,” said Lori Cragin, the Health Department’s state epidemiologist for environmental health. “We are working to increase voluntary compliance among contractors, and raise awareness about the health risks to workers and anyone near the renovation projects at the start of the busiest season.”

If you are working in a pre-1978 building, assume that all paints and coatings are lead-based unless a Vermont-licensed lead inspector has inspected the property and found otherwise by use of an X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) analyzer or by laboratory analysis of paint chips.

“So if you’re doing the work yourself, be aware of lead-safe work practices, and if you’re working with a contractor, ask about their lead-safe work practices,” said Cragin.

Lead-Safe work practices include limiting access to the work zone, enclosing it with plastic sheeting, and wearing protective clothing. Surfaces should be misted before disturbing paint, and workers should make sure not to leave with paint dust on their clothes that can be transported off the site. Dry scraping, use of chemical strippers, open flame burning or torching, heat guns, and dry sweeping lead-contaminated surfaces or areas are prohibited.

The use of sanding machines, high pressure washing, chemical stripping and de-leading paint surfaces are only authorized under a lead abatement permit, and must be done by a Vermont licensed lead abatement contractor using work practices approved by the Health Department.

Lead Safe Vermont, a comprehensive lead awareness program administered by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, offers free guides and information for homeowners, contractors, renters, landlords and child care providers at: www.leadSAFEvermont.org.

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