

LEAD-BASED PAINT HAZARDS

Introduction

Lead-based paint is a hazard to individuals, particularly children. Lead is a naturally-occurring element harmful to people when taken into the body through ingestion or inhalation. Lead accumulates within various organs of the body, is stored for extended periods in the bones, and can cause serious and long-lasting physical and neurological problems.

Children under the age of 16 are the most vulnerable to exposure to lead-based paint because their bodies and nervous systems are still developing. Lead can enter the body quickly in large doses or slowly over time. When lead enters the human body, the lead becomes an improper part of the body's chemistry and can inhibit normal bodily functions. The body cannot process the lead, and excess amounts can be stored in the bones for decades after the initial exposure.

Not Widespread Problem in Sarasota County

Sarasota County has not had a history of lead-based paint hazards nor does there appear to be a widespread problem, according to the Sarasota County Health Department.

The Health Department tests all clients up to age six for lead exposure. Children over age six are tested only if they are high risk. Private physicians occasionally test for lead exposure and refer clients to the Health Department.

The Health Department tests for lead-based paint in residences and businesses using a chemical test kit. Staff follows up on any report of blood lead levels in children over 10 micrograms per deciliter (mg/dcl). Blood lead levels as low as 10 mg/dcl or more are associated with harmful effects on children's learning and behavior. The Health Department randomly tests facilities that serve children for lead-based paint. No childcare centers have been found with exposed lead paint.

Officials at the Health Department said they have found a small number in the 10 to 15 mg/dcl range – which they investigate as a public service. At 15 mg/dcl, action and/or investigation is mandatory. The Health Department reported 11 children from 2002 to 2004 with a blood lead level that required action.

Methodology

In October of 2002, a study was released called “The Prevalence of Lead-Based Paint Hazards in U.S. Housing” and was published in Environmental Health Perspectives. According to this study, houses built up to 1998 all have some level of lead hazards.

However, the level of risk increases with the age of the house. According to the research:

- 68% of houses built prior to 1940 pose a hazard;
- 43% of homes built from 1940 through 1959 pose a hazard;
- 8% of homes built from 1960 through 1977 pose a hazard;
- 3% of homes built from 1978 to 1998 pose a hazard.

According to the Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing Sarasota County has:

- 3,604 homes built prior to 1940;
- 18,572 homes built between 1940 and 1959;
- 76,844 homes built between 1960 and 1979;
- 78,583 homes built between 1980 and 1998

Using the methodology and being somewhat conservative since it was necessary to lump 1978 and 1979 in a higher hazard bracket:

- There are 2,450 homes built prior to 1940 with a lead-based paint hazard;
- There are 7,986 homes built from 1940 through 1959 with a lead-based paint hazard;
- There are 6,147 homes built from 1960 to 1979 with a lead-based paint hazard;
- There are 2,357 homes built from 1980 to 1998 with a lead-based paint hazard;
- Of the projected occupied housing units in 2005, there are a total of 18,940 homes with lead-based paint, approximately 12%.

According to Shimberg, approximately 35% of all households are occupied by low-income residents. Based on this:

- An estimated 6,629 homes with a lead-based paint hazard are occupied by low income residents;

Lead-based paint hazard reduction will be integrated into all housing policies and programs in Sarasota County. The Sarasota Consortium is taking a number of measures to evaluate and reduce lead-based paint hazards. They include:

- Low-income homeowners who discover lead-based paint in their homes will qualify for a grant to remedy the risks posed by the lead.
- Individuals qualifying for rental assistance through the Section 8 program in the county receive a HUD pamphlet titled *Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home*.
- Owners of Section 8 rental properties constructed prior to 1979 that receive Federal assistance through the Sarasota Office of Housing and Community Development and/or the Sarasota Housing Authority are required to send to new tenants the applicable lead-based paint notice(s);

- Section 8 units and sites must be in compliance with the new HUD lead-based paint regulations;
 - Individuals taking part in the Down Payment Assistance Program receive a copy of *Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home*.
 - Units rehabilitated using Federal funds will be required to abide by new HUD lead-based paint regulations.
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