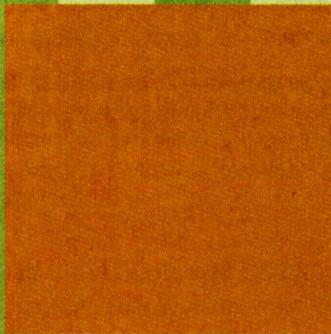
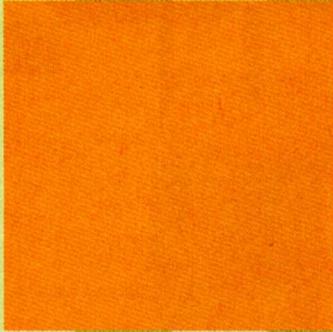
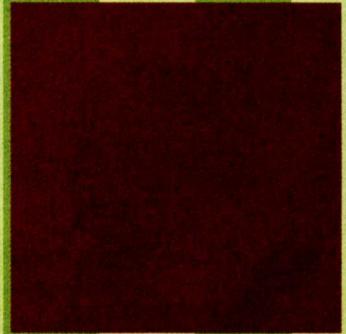
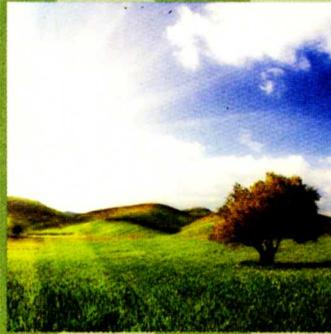
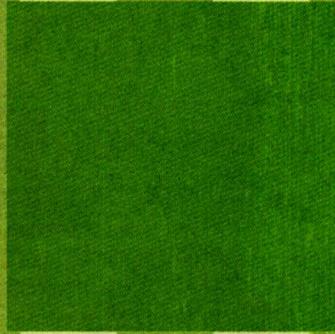


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Safety

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Help Ensure a Lead-Free Environment for Children

By Maria J. Doa

Is your school or child-care facility planning to make repairs or renovations? If so, there are new federal regulations that must be followed in order to protect children from lead-based paint hazards that can result from this type of work. Children can be exposed to toxic dust from lead-based paint when older housing or buildings are renovated or repaired. Because many children spend a great deal of time in schools or child-care facilities, it is especially important for administrators, child-care business owners, and parents to be aware of potential lead hazards associated with renovation or repair work in older buildings.

The dangers of lead

Approximately 300,000 children have elevated levels of lead in their bodies as a result of exposure to lead hazards, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Lead poisoning can affect nearly every part of the body, but because symptoms can be vague, such poisoning frequently goes unrecognized. Children age 6 and younger are at particular risk, in part because young children's growing bodies absorb more lead and also because they tend to put things in their mouths, including paint chips, antique toys that may contain lead-based paint, and objects that may

be covered with lead dust from renovations. If not detected early, children with high levels of lead in their bodies can suffer damage to the brain and nervous system; behavior and learning problems, such as hyperactivity; slowed growth; hearing problems; and headaches.

New federal regulations

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is taking action to protect children from the dangers of lead-based paint dust with a regulation that applies to any facility built before 1978 in which children 6 years old or younger

Test your school or childcare facility for lead

To reduce children's exposure to lead, a school or child-care facility can be tested by having a lead-based paint inspection or risk assessment performed. For more information on lead, including inspections and risk assessments, visit EPA's website (www.epa.gov/lead) or call the National Lead Information Center (NLIC) at 1(800) 424-LEAD [5323]. The NLIC provides the general public and professionals with information about lead hazards and their prevention.

spend considerable time. This includes homes, child-care/day-care facilities, preschools, kindergartens, and many elementary schools. The regulation requires contractors and maintenance staff who repair or renovate these facilities to provide their occupants, as well as the parents of children attending the facilities, information about the hazards of lead.

EPA's rule requires these workers to distribute a lead hazard information pamphlet called *Renovate Right* before the work begins. They also must make this information available to parents of children using the facility by either mailing the pamphlet to each parent or posting the information prominently at the facility. The new requirements apply to all renovation, repair, or painting activities except for very minor work. Contractors who must comply with these requirements include builders, painters, plumbers, and electricians.

EPA's pamphlet describes ways renovators and individuals can protect themselves and others from lead-based paint hazards. The pamphlet contains helpful information regarding lead-based paint, including information about the health impacts of lead, ways children can be exposed to lead, how to identify lead hazards, how to protect against exposure during a renovation, and where to find more information on lead.

In addition, starting in 2010, contractors and maintenance staff must

- * Be certified and trained to perform lead-safe renovation and repair jobs, and

- * Use lead-safe work practices to prevent contamination and potential exposure of building occupants.

In 2010, EPA's new rule will require contractors to use some simple, but effective, lead-safe work practices, including:

- * Containing the work area by covering floors and furniture, and sealing off doors and heating and cooling system vents so any dust generated by the renovation is not spread outside the work area.

- * Posting warning signs that clearly define the work area and notify occupants to remain outside of the work area.

- * Minimizing the dust. Using water to mist areas before sanding is one way this can be accomplished.

- * Conducting a thorough clean-up using special cleaning methods, such as using a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter vacuum and wet mopping.

What PTA leaders, schools, and staff can do

While contractors aren't required to be certified until 2010, there are steps that can be taken in the meantime to ensure renovations are done in a lead-safe manner. These include the following:

- * Asking if the contractor is aware of the federal lead-safe renovation regulations,

- * Asking if the contractor is aware of state regulations (some states may have their own regulations, which may be more stringent than the federal regulations),

- * Asking what lead-safe methods the contractor will use to set up and perform the job in the facility,

- * Making sure contractors follow the lead-safe work practices previously described, and

- * Requiring the contractor to conduct a thorough clean-up and test to make sure there is no lead dust remaining after the job is finished.

After the job is over, take a look around. There should be no dust, paint chips, or debris in the work area. If you see any dust, paint chips, or debris, request that the area be thoroughly recleaned.

To help make the new regulation work, school administrators and staff, owners and operators of child-care and preschool facilities, and parents should be made aware that these new regulations are in effect, as well as receive required information about lead-safe renovation and repair work. PTA leaders are in an ideal position to inform parents about this new regulation and work with school officials and staff to ensure that proper procedures for renovation and repair work that may cause a lead hazard are followed. 

Maria J. Doa, PhD, is director, National Program Chemicals Division, U. S. Environmental Protection Agency.