

Renovate Right: Prevent Lead Poisoning in Children

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Susan Laird] Welcome to this podcast on lead poisoning prevention. I'm your host, Susan Laird. Joining me by phone today is Dr. Maria Doa, Director of the Environmental Protection Agency's National Program Chemicals Division.

Dr. Doa, I understand that EPA issued a rule in April 2008 that, for the first time, requires renovators, repairers, and painters to take steps to protect occupants from being poisoned by lead dust. Why is EPA so concerned?

[Dr. Maria Doa] Well, home renovation can generate a lot of dust if the work area is not properly contained and cleaned. In homes with lead-based paint, this can result in elevated blood-lead levels in young children, and sometimes leading to serious learning and behavioral problems. Childhood lead poisoning is a preventable disease and our goal is to eliminate it.

[Susan Laird] What evidence does EPA have that renovation, repair, and painting activities cause an increase in children's blood-lead levels?

[Dr. Maria Doa] There are numerous studies which show that renovation activities have resulted in increased blood-lead levels in children. For example, in one study, EPA evaluated the relationship between children's blood-lead levels and renovation activities in homes with lead-based paint and, according to the study, children living in a home while renovation and remodeling were conducted were more than 30 percent more likely to have elevated blood-lead levels than if there was no renovation in the home. In particular, removing paint by using flame torches, using high temperature heat guns, and preparing surfaces by mechanical sanding, significantly increased the risk of elevated blood-lead levels in children.

[Susan Laird] Well, what about children who visit grandma's house or families who move into a home right after it's renovated? Shouldn't they be protected too?

[Dr. Maria Doa] Well, the greatest risk is to young children who live in a home during renovation. And our existing rules also require notification to all homeowners of the potential dangers to children of lead dust from renovation. Our new rule gives the homeowner the option of choosing to have a certified renovator not follow lead-safe work practices. However, if they choose not to use the certified renovator and lead-safe work practices, the homeowner must certify that no children or pregnant women reside in the home.

[Susan Laird] About how many builders, painters, plumbers, electricians, and other contractors will be affected by the new lead rule?

[Dr. Maria Doa] EPA estimates that approximately 210,000 firms will be affected. This is the estimated number of companies that will become certified to engage in renovation, repair, or painting activities.

[Susan Laird] Dr. Doa, tell us what's covered by the rule.

[Dr. Maria Doa] The rule applies to paid contractors working in pre-1978 housing, childcare facilities, and schools with lead-based paint. Contractors include home improvement contractors, maintenance workers in multi-family housing, painters, and other specialty trades. The covered facilities include pre-1978 residential, public, or commercial buildings where children under age six are present on a regular basis, as well as all rental housing. The rule applies to renovation, repair, or painting activities where more than six square feet of lead-based paint is disturbed in a room or where 20 square feet of lead-based paint is disturbed on the exterior.

[Susan Laird] What does the rule require?

[Dr. Maria Doa] Lead-safe work practice standards require renovators to be trained in the use of lead-safe work practices, that renovators and firms be certified, that providers of renovation training be accredited, and that renovators follow specific lead-safe work practice standards.

[Susan Laird] Tell us more about lead-safe work practices.

[Dr. Maria Doa] First, certain dangerous work practices are prohibited for every renovation, including minor maintenance or repair jobs. Prohibited practices include open flame burning or torching; sanding, grinding, needle gunning, or blasting with power tools not equipped with a shroud and a High Efficiency Particulate Air, or HEPA, vacuum attachment. The rule also prohibits using a heat gun at temperatures greater than 1100° F. The rule also requires that:

- Firms must post signs clearly defining the work area and warning occupants and other persons not involved in the renovation to remain outside of the work area.
- Before beginning the renovation, the firm must isolate the work area so that no dust or debris leaves the work area while the renovation is being performed.
- Waste from renovation activities must be contained to prevent releases of dust and debris.
- And after the renovation is complete, the firm must clean the work area. The certified renovator must verify the cleanliness of the work area using a procedure involving disposable cleaning cloths.

[Susan Laird] What are the responsibilities of the renovation firm?

[Dr. Maria Doa] Firms performing renovations also must ensure that:

- All persons performing renovation activities are certified renovators or have received on-the-job training by a certified renovator;
- A certified renovator is assigned to each renovation performed by the firm; and
- All renovations are performed in accordance with applicable work practice standards.

[Susan Laird] How does a firm become certified?

[Dr. Maria Doa] Firms that perform renovations for compensation need to apply to EPA or to a state that has an approved program for certification to perform renovations. Firms will have to apply for re-certification every five years.

[Susan Laird] When did the new EPA rule become effective?

[Dr. Maria Doa] The rule was effective on June 23, 2008, and contains procedures for the authorization of States, Territories, and Tribes to administer and enforce these standards and regulations. The renovation program in the States, Territories, and Tribes that do not have an authorized renovation program will be administered by EPA's federal program. The rule will be implemented as follows:

- States, Territories, and Tribes may apply for program authorization now by submitting their application to their EPA Regional Office.
- Training programs may apply for accreditation beginning in April 2009.
- Renovation firms may apply for certification beginning October 2009 and must be certified by April 2010.
- After April 2010, all renovations must be performed by certified firms in accordance with the rule's work practice standards and associated recordkeeping requirements.

[Susan Laird] Where can our listeners get more information about the new rule and lead in general?

[Dr. Maria Doa] Listeners can visit our web site at www.epa.gov/lead. They can also call our National Lead Information Center by calling 1-800-424-LEAD, that's 1-800-424-5323.

[Susan Laird] Thank you, Dr. Maria Doa, for sharing this important information about EPA's new lead renovation, repair, and painting rule.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.