

Lead In The Home

You'd be hard pressed to sell a home with such a label attached to it. And yet, many older homes in the United States might contain lead. You see, prior to 1978, paints and other products containing lead were widely used in homes and offices. Chipping and peeling paint can expose occupants to this hazardous material. In addition, many older plumbing systems utilized lead-based solder to join pipes. This lead can leach into the water, especially when running hot water. In certain areas, high concentrations of lead can even be found in the ground soil.

Unknown in years past, it is now clear that lead causes a number of health-related problems. In children this can include growth and learning disabilities, headaches and even brain damage. Adults are not immune either. High levels of lead have been tied to problem pregnancies, high-blood pressure and digestive problems.

Before you buy or sell an older home, you need to know what hazards may exist. If selling, federal law stipulates that you must disclose any lead-based paint in the home. If you're buying, you want to know what hazards may be lurking in the walls, as well as in the pipes, before you put up your earnest money. If you suspect that a house contains high levels of lead, you should contact a qualified professional to do an inspection. These tradesmen use a range of tools from the well-trained eye to complex, specialized equipment to detect lead levels and recommend appropriate solutions. The National Lead Information Center (<http://www.epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm>) can help you find a resource.

Many solutions exist for cleaning up lead concentrations. Depending upon your situation, you may find one of these an adequate solution. Removing lead-based paint, for example, may be as much trouble as it is worth. First, just the act of stripping the paint from the walls is likely to create dust and debris which is more likely to be ingested. Given these hazards, you should consult a certified contractor to complete this kind of work. Short of removing the paint, you may be able to get by with covering the old, lead-based paint with a coat of sealant specifically designed for this purpose. Once again, a certified contractor will be able to recommend an appropriate solution. Financial assistance is even available in certain circumstances.

So even though a house may not carry a warning label from the EPA, a little common sense and a sharp eye should keep your family safe.