Members

Toolbox Talk

Lead-Based Paint

Lead paint, common in older buildings and beneath newer layers, is a chemical hazard. Some special purpose paints still use lead and are clearly labeled as toxic. Assume buildings over 25 years old contain lead.

Awareness of hazards:

Like all health risks, multiple exposures can occur over periods of time and harmful effects may not be immediately observable. When lead particles enter the bloodstream, it can have detrimental effects including organ failure and brain damage. Burning off lead paint releases toxic vapours.

Stripping old paint creates toxic dust and particles. Lead can be ingested or inhaled – and can be transported home on contaminated clothing. It is particularly harmful children and brain damage can occur before obvious symptoms appear. Lead is also harmful to animals and the environment.

Understanding risks:

Different aspects of the work environment, work activities and worker behaviour combine to create risks. Lead may be present in dust and debris during painting or demolition work. The danger to workers is significantly reduced by following safe work methods and using PPE correctly.

Safe behaviours include containing and collecting dust and preventing it entering houses, keeping children and pets away, and securely wrapping and disposing of dust and chips. **Unsafe behaviours** include eating, smoking, or drinking around paintwork and without washing face and hands. Wearing contaminated clothes home and allowing paint and dust to remain in the environment are risks to others.

Because workers will come into contact with the hazard, PPE use is critical. Appropriate respirators should be used when sanding or burning off paint. Hair should be covered as it can collect dust. Clothing should be disposable or cleaned commercially. Workers should shower after work.

Employers should monitor exposure levels and worker health to detect harm early.

Eliminate or minimise risks (examples):

Risk controls focus on either the hazard or the behaviour of workers and others.

- **Eliminate the hazard.** Lead paint should not be used unless for special purposes.
- **Substitute the hazard.** Alternative paints are used.
- **Isolate the hazard.** Isolation zones. Sealing gaps. Drop sheets. Containment.
- **Use engineered modifications.** HEPA filtered vacuums. Water blasters.

Focusing on human behaviours include:

- **Administration** of safe systems of work. Training. Health monitoring. Showering/washing and laundry facilities. Regular breaks. EARLY TREATMENT WHEN LEAD POISONING IS SUSPECTED.
- **Personal protection equipment (PPE).** Disposable coveralls. Respirators (AS/NZS). Eye wear, masks, and headwear.