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Lead Hazards  
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## Lead Hazards

### Lead Holding its Grip on DeKalb County

“One out of ever 40 American children has too much lead in their bodies. The rate of lead poisoning is even higher in cities. Dust from lead paint is the biggest threat to young children,” according to the Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control (OHHLHC), a branch of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In addition, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that lead poisoning in children can result in damage to the brain and nervous system, sometimes causing seizures or death, behavior and learning problems, slowed growth, hearing problems, and headaches. Even in adults, symptoms can include difficulties during pregnancy, reproductive problems, high blood pressure, digestive problems, nerve disorders, memory and concentration problems, and muscle and joint pain.

In another statistic by the EPA, “83 percent of private housing and 86 percent of public housing built prior to 1980 contain some lead-based paint”. Consequently, more houses in the Midwest have lead-based paint than in other parts of the country. In addition, the EPA states that 35% of all low-income housing has lead hazards. The problem is so bad that the Indiana State Department of Health, among others, launched a program to help abolish lead poisoning by informing the general public of the effects of lead hazards in the home and by helping to provide resources for free screening among children. According to a study conducted in Indiana during the fiscal year of 1999, in DeKalb County, there were only four homes inspected for possible lead hazards. The table below summarizes the number of homes within the county that could have some type of lead hazards, according to the Indiana State Department of Health.

*Only four homes were tested for lead hazards in DeKalb County in the fiscal year of 1999.*

*The Consumer Product Safety Commission banned lead sales for use in residences in 1978.*

*Federal Disclosure Laws exist that require property owners to hand over information about a home's lead based paint problems to a potential tenant or homebuyer.*

*Inhaling lead dust is the number one way people become poisoned.*

## HOUSING DATA

Total number of housing units	13,601
Total number of housing units built prior to 1950	6,236
Percent of housing built prior to 1950	45.8%
Number of housing units inspected for lead hazards	4

As shown, of the 6,236 homes that were constructed within the county prior to 1950, only four were inspected for possible lead hazards in the 1999 study. While there is no research to show what was found in these homes, it is clear that not many people are making sure that the lead based paint in their home is free from hazards. However, the number of cases of lead poisoning in children continues to decline every year as more people become aware. After all, we first learned of the effects of lead over 100 years ago! Unfortunately, the Consumer Product Safety Commission did not ban its sale for use in residences until 1978, so we still have many homes with lead based paint that continues to pose possible hazards today.

On March 6, 1996, Federal Disclosure Laws were implemented that require landlords and sellers of homes or apartments to inform any potential buyer or tenant of information they have regarding a particular home's lead based paint issues. If a homeowner is selling their home without a broker, it is their responsibility to provide the potential buyer with information they have about the home's lead based paint. However, an inspection of a home is not required, so there is not always knowledge available about lead hazards in the home. Despite this, anyone who is selling a home that was built prior to 1978 must provide a potential homeowner with an informational packet, "[Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home.](#)" provided by the EPA.

What the informational packet says is that lead based paint chips are extremely toxic, but the number one way that people become poisoned by lead is by ingesting lead dust. Some of the other places you will find lead is in the air surrounding factories that use lead for production, in some imported vinyl blinds, in lead-glazed

*People who live in a home constructed before 1980 and those who have a family member with a job involving lead should have a blood test.*

*Sixty-four million dwellings in the United States have lead-based paint.*

*An inspector checks paint for lead, a risk assessor checks for lead hazards and gives ideas on how to fix them.*

porcelain and pottery, in lead crystal, in soil (primarily due to gasoline, which used to contain high amounts of lead), in stained glass, in old food cans, and in the solder in old water pipes. You can also find lead in the clothes, hair, shoes, and skin of many of the people who work in construction, bridge building, sandblasting, shipbuilding, plumbing, battery making and recycling, car repair, furniture refinishing, and foundry casting. These people can easily spread around lead dust by just walking in their homes with the clothes they wore for work or by washing their clothes with the same loads as the rest of their family.

For children who are six-years-old and younger, free testing is offered through the state of Indiana. In order to receive the information needed, contact the DeKalb County Health Department at (260) 925-2220 or at (260) 925-2090. Not everyone who lives in a home that was constructed before 1980 or those who have a family member who works at a job with a high-risk of lead exposure is going to test positive for lead poisoning. However, they should be tested.

In addition to testing blood levels for lead, it is recommended to have your home tested. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, lead based paint resides in nearly 64 million dwellings. There are two ways to have a home checked for lead: an inspection or a risk assessment. An inspection measures the lead content of all painted surfaces in a home. However, it does not determine if there is a lead hazard since lead paint is only detrimental if it is chipping off. In a risk assessment, the home is checked for any serious lead exposures, and the risk assessor informs the homeowner of options to take to fix the problem. Home test kits that check for lead are available, but they are not always accurate because other chemicals in the paint can influence the results, and they do not determine if there is a risk for lead poisoning or not.

In Indiana, an inspector and a risk assessor both must take courses through the Indiana Department of Environmental Management and pass the course exam with a score no less than 70%. They must take another exam to certify them for the title and pass with a score no less than 70%. A risk assessor must have a year or more of experience, depending on their schooling background, and

*A certified contractor is the only one qualified to eliminate lead hazards in a home. An amateur can make things worse.*

*During renovation or the elimination of hazards, known as abatement, a contractor must follow these guidelines:*

- 1. Seal off the room with plastic sheeting.*
- 2. Remove all items from the room.*
- 3. Wear removable, protective clothing.*
- 4. Wear a HEPA-filtered respirator and use a HEPA-filtered vacuum cleaner.*
- 5. Take no less than one hour to clean the room everyday.*

they must take an additional exam to be certified as an inspector, as well. In order to determine if an inspector or a risk assessor is certified, you can go to [leadlisting.org](http://leadlisting.org) or contact the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

If it is determined that there is lead in the paint and you want it removed, or a risk assessor informs you of a hazard in the home or in the soil around the home, it is important that a certified contractor, also found at [leadlisting.org](http://leadlisting.org) or at the Indiana Department of Management, is called in to make the home safe. These people have undergone rigorous training, have the proper supplies and tools, and they have experience. An amateur can actually do more harm than good by stirring up unseen dust in the air and thereby making things more toxic than they were before.

When a certified contractor comes into a home to remodel or to renovate or to permanently remove lead hazards, otherwise known as abatement, you may want to check that they are following certain guidelines.

It is essential that the contractor work in a sealed area in order to prevent lead dust from spreading throughout the home. The room should be sealed with plastic or polyethylene sheeting, and the contractor must not walk through the rest of the home without removing all protective clothing or shoes. All items in the room must be removed or tightly packaged in the sheeting and sealed with duct tape. Heating and air conditioning vents should also be sealed off, and the floor should be covered if it is not a part of the renovation or abatement.

It is best if all workers wear a NIOSH-certified respirator with a HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate Air) filter attached. Water should be sprayed on lead surfaces often in order to keep dust weighted down. Clean up must be administered at the end of every workday and should take no less than one hour; it sometimes takes this long for all the dust particles in the air to settle. Furthermore, the contractor should have a HEPA filter-equipped vacuum cleaner on hand and use it often. The sheeting on the floor should be removed and replaced everyday, and the area beneath should be vacuumed thoroughly. If there are children or pregnant women in

*Interim procedures are those things that can be done to lower the risk for lead poisoning.*

*Interim procedures are only meant to be used for a lead hazard during the time it takes to have a certified contractor come in.*

the home, it may be best for them to leave during the entire abatement or renovation process until after a clearance examination has been done. This includes a visual inspection and a dust analysis to ensure that the home is safe.

Some problem spots that generally need to be replaced if they are covered in lead based paint are friction surfaces that are rubbed often, like a window or a tightly fitting door. In addition, impact surfaces that are bumped or banged often like doors, baseboards, or doorjambs need to have paint removed.

Interim procedures are those things that can be done to lower the risk of lead poisoning. For instance, dust needs to be cleaned up with a HEPA vacuum cleaner or a wet, non-abrasive mop at least once a week. In other areas, dust should be wiped down with a wet rag. Special attention needs to be paid to window sills, porch swings, floors or steps, window troughs, cracks and crevices, steps, carpets and rugs, exposed soil, mats, sandboxes, upholstered furnishings, window coverings, radiators, grates, and registers, heating, ventilation, or air conditioners. These are all areas where lead dust is likely to settle. For contaminated soil, you can lower the risks of contamination by making sure that grass remains as a buffer, and it is important not to plant vegetable gardens in the area. Interim procedures are only meant to be used as a precaution for lead based paint that is tested to be in good condition and not yet a hazard. In addition, they are only good for the time it takes to contact a certified contractor to eliminate lead hazards. Remember, even the safest interim measures cannot keep someone safe from poisoning if lead based paint is chipping or peeling and there is a hazard in the home.

*For this and other articles and helpful hints for real estate, visit our website at: [www.goodvaluation.com](http://www.goodvaluation.com)*

We are currently in the process of working on a series of articles that focus on contamination issues that effect homes in the marketplace. We will tell you about the potential damage caused to properties and homes and bring you helpful advice on how you can prevent or eliminate safety hazards. As each article in this series is completed, we will be placing them on the website and sending them out via email to everyone on our contact list. To get on the contact list, visit our website at [www.goodvaluation.com](http://www.goodvaluation.com) and register as a new user. Make sure to include your email address. For those who may not have email, contact our office, and we will work with you to determine how you can receive future articles.

*For future articles, register on our website or contact our office.*

*The information analyzed within this article was obtained from research conducted by the author and others in the research department of Good Valuation, Inc. Information was also obtained from web sites such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development- Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, leadlisting.com, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, and from information obtained from the Indiana State Department of Health. Opinions expressed are based on observations and analyses conducted by the author.*