HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

LEAD PAINT RISKS

As some of you know, I am in the process of repairing and renovating my house after hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne. Thanks to friends and family, I am finally seeing progress.

Many in our community are still dealing with repairs after last summer’s storms and this season is just underway. Please note some special precautions if you have a home that was built prior to 1978- lead-based paint.

Window replacement, drywall repair, texture and painting are some typical projects as well as replacing doors, trim and flooring. All these repairs are overwhelming on their own, but add in the risks of poisoning from lead paint dust and the entire repair or renovation project takes on additional complicating procedures.

Check the label on paint cans now and you will see they explain the potential for exposure to lead when you are preparing to repaint. Pay special attention to these warnings if you are working on an older home. Lead poisoning is irreversible and long lasting.

Lead was used in paint because it kills mold and mildew, common conditions in our humid climate. Lead-based paints were common on windows and doors and on walls in damp areas like kitchens and bathrooms. Lead helps paint dry faster and adds color and brightens paint. It also adds durability in heavy use areas like porches, floors and staircases.

Lead use has been restricted since 1978 but lead-based paints can still be used for limited applications such as on bridges or steel to prevent corrosion and rust. Road marking paint may still contain lead.

Lead is sweet and was used in ancient times to enhance food flavors. Lead-based paints have a sweet taste so paint chips would be considered tasty when eaten by young children. They can also eat paint dust that gets on toys or on their hands as they play in contaminated soil or pick up dust off of contaminated floors or windowsills.

Lead can also enter the body by breathing dust. Once in the blood stream, it attaches to red blood cells and prevents them from carrying oxygen. Lead poisoning can result in high blood pressure and kidney failure.

Lead is especially toxic to young children because their nervous system is still forming. It is also dangerous for women of childbearing age, especially pregnant women. It can cause brain damage, depression, forgetfulness, clumsiness, learning disabilities and symptoms like attention deficit disorder.

Lead is stored in the bones and teeth and can stay in the body for up to 30 years. It is released back into the blood in times of stress causing problems again. It can be confirmed by blood test or bone tests including sampling baby teeth.

Windows in old houses can result in paint dust from the friction of opening and closing. Even walking on painted floors can cause dust. If the paint is lead-based, risks are significant. If the paint is intact, and painted over, risk is reduced. Dust and paint chips from sanding or heating to remove old paint are a hazard.

There are special precautions that must be followed when working with lead-based paints. Clothes from working around lead-based products should be laundered separately and children must be kept out of these areas.

Paint is not the only way we can be exposed to lead. Leaded fuels used to be commonplace, but now, unleaded fuel is the norm and there are restrictions on the amount of lead allowed in them. Emissions from use of leaded fuels have produced lead in the atmosphere that has been deposited in our soils. Some foods grown on lead contaminated soils have the ability to uptake lead which is then incorporated into our bodies.

Lead pipes and lead solder were common until the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1986 and 1988 eliminated its use in household plumbing, but it can still be a risk with older homes.
Roofers often still work with lead shields to protect roof vent pipes. Fisherman use lead sinkers but new ones manufactured since 1996 cannot contain lead. Hobbyists that make stained glass art often use lead frames and potters frequently use glazes that contain lead. Lead shot is used in ammunition such as pellets for air rifles.

There are also many ethnic home remedies from other countries that contain lead and are considered extremely hazardous to children. Examples include ghasard, pay-loo-ah, kandu, bala goli, maria luisa, azarcon (also known as alarcon) and greta. Bakhoor, henna, litargirio, kohl (also called alkohl, surma and saoot) and cordyceps are other ethnic practices that put children at risk.

The get the whole scoop on your risk and how to reduce it, call the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD or go to the web [here](#) to print the flier.

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