

Managing lead-based paint removal

Advice for employers and employees about managing the risks associated with removing lead-based paint.

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Background

Lead poisoning can cause kidney, nerve and brain damage. It can occur from a single exposure to a high dose of lead; however, it more commonly builds up in the body over a period of time from repeated exposure to small amounts, often without obvious symptoms of poisoning.

Solid lead, in itself, presents little or no risk to people. However, when lead is processed in a way that produces lead dust, fumes or mist it can become a health risk. Exposure can occur through inhalation of airborne lead-containing dust or ingestion of lead contaminated hands or food.

Paint with a high lead content was used on many buildings and structures built prior to 1970 and may have since been covered by more recently applied non-lead based paint. Lead-based paint can pose a health risk if it has deteriorated and become powdery or flaky, or when sanding or buffing of lead-based paint produces lead dust.

Employees and their families, building occupants, and people in neighbouring buildings may be at risk if the lead-based paint removal process is not appropriately managed.

Who's responsible for managing the risk?

Employers and employees have legal duties to control the risks associated with dust generated from lead-based paint under Part 4.4 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007 (the Regulations).

Employer duties

The paint removal contractor, as either a self-employed person or the employer of the persons undertaking the work, will typically have the primary duty to manage the risks of lead-based paint removal. However, where applicable, the builder, or other persons in management and control of the workplace, will also have responsibilities to ensure the paint removal contractor provides and maintains a safe system of work for the lead-based paint removal.

Note: home owners who engage a contractor to undertake painting works should inform the painting contractor of the location of lead-based paint when its presence is known.

Where the building or structure was built prior to 1970 or if there is concern that lead-based paint is present, the paint should be tested to either verify the paint is lead-based or that lead is not present.

If the paint is lead-based, the employer **must** ensure the lead exposure risks associated with the paint removal process are managed by:

- **Applying** the highest level of control (hierarchy of controls) to the risks associated with the removal process. For example, avoid creating dust by using a chemical paint stripper; where this is not reasonably practicable, use an extraction sander with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration to capture dust at the source in combination with an appropriate Australian Standards approved respirator.
- **Ensuring** that the lead exposure standard (prescribed in the Regulations) is not exceeded. If there is uncertainty about the level of exposure, the employer must carry out **atmospheric monitoring**.
- **Providing** results of any atmospheric monitoring, as soon as is reasonably practicable, to any employee who has been, or may be exposed to lead-based paint dust.
- **Arranging** biological monitoring (blood tests) and medical examinations for employees if the blood lead level (prescribed in the Regulations) is reasonably likely to be exceeded. If the blood lead level is reasonably likely to be exceeded, the job would be categorised as a lead-risk job and additional requirements apply. VWA's 'Lead at work' information sheet provides further guidance about how and when exposure to lead in the workplace must be biologically monitored and medical examinations carried out.
- **Ensuring** that any lead contamination caused by the removal process is confined to the removal area, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- **Cleaning** the area where the lead process is carried out regularly and ensuring that the cleaning methods used do not create additional risks. For example, use a vacuum cleaner with HEPA filtration to remove lead-containing dust.

- **Ensuring** that persons do not eat, drink, chew gum or carry materials used for smoking in the lead process area.
- **Providing** an eating and drinking area that, so far as reasonably practicable, cannot be contaminated with lead from the paint removal.
- **Providing and maintaining** changing and washing facilities for employees.
- **Providing** employees with protective clothing and appropriate laundering or disposal facilities for lead contaminated clothing.
- **Providing** job applicants with information about the health risks and toxic effects associated with lead exposure; and the need for, and details of, medical examinations and biological monitoring.
- **Providing** employees with information in relation to the need for, and details of, medical examinations and biological monitoring **before** employees first start working in a lead removal process.
- **Reviewing** and, if necessary, revising any control measures when required by the Regulations.

***Note:** This guidance material has been prepared using the best information available to the Victorian WorkCover Authority, and should be used for general use only. Any information about legislative obligations or responsibilities included in this material is only applicable to the circumstances described in the material. You should always check the legislation referred to in this material and make your own judgement about what action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with the law. Accordingly, the Victorian WorkCover Authority cannot be held responsible and extends no warranties as to the suitability of the information for your specific circumstances; or actions taken by third parties as a result of information contained in the guidance material.*

Employee duties

Employees also have specific legal responsibilities and must:

- **Not** eat, drink, chew gum, smoke or carry materials used for smoking in any area where the lead removal process is being undertaken.
- **Remove** any lead contaminated clothing and equipment before entering the area designated for eating and drinking.
- **Wash** their hands and face after leaving the lead removal area and before eating, drinking or smoking.

VWA publications

[Code of Practice for Lead](#)

[More information sheet - Lead at Work](#)

Other

[Surface Coating Industry: Industry Standard](#)

[Australian Standard: Guide to lead paint management](#)

[AS4361.2-1998: Guide to lead paint management:](#)

[Residential and commercial buildings](#)

Contact Details

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For more information on occupational health and safety, go to WorkSafe's website: **worksafe.vic.gov.au**