TOOLBOX TALK

LEAD AWARENESS

Lead can hurt you without giving you much warning. You usually cannot see lead dust in the air, smell it, taste it, or feel it entering your body. You may feel perfectly fine while exposure is occurring. For restoration workers, that matters because sanding, grinding, chipping, cutting, burning, blasting, or demolishing a lead-containing coating can turn something that was sitting on a building for decades into dust or fumes that can enter your body.

WHAT LEAD DOES TO THE BODY

Lead is a poison. Once it enters the bloodstream, it can travel throughout the body and affect the brain and nervous system, kidneys, blood-forming system, and reproductive system. Repeated exposure can increase the amount of lead in the body, and symptoms are not a reliable way to determine whether harmful exposure is occurring.

Children are especially vulnerable because their bodies and brains are still developing. Lead-contaminated dust can settle on floors, toys, furniture, and other surfaces. Young children frequently put their hands and objects in their mouths and may also ingest deteriorated paint chips. This is one reason bringing lead dust home on clothing, boots, tools, or inside a vehicle is a serious concern.

GET IT EVALUATED

You cannot determine whether a coating contains lead by its color, condition, or appearance. If an older or unknown coating or material will be disturbed, make sure it has been properly evaluated through the company's process by someone trained and qualified to evaluate the potential lead hazard.

Do not confuse OSHA's construction lead requirements with EPA's commonly discussed pre-1978 rules: OSHA's construction standard does not establish a building-age cutoff—it applies when construction work may occupationally expose an employee to lead.

Over time, employers should build a useful history of testing and exposure data from the types of buildings, coatings, tasks, and controls they encounter. Good historical data can help identify where lead is more or less likely and, when OSHA's specific requirements are met, can also help support exposure determinations. The data must actually represent sufficiently similar work and conditions; a company's experience should improve its decisions, not become a reason to assume.

KEEP LEAD OUT OF YOUR BODY AND YOUR HOME

The two major routes into your body are breathing lead dust or fumes and swallowing lead contamination. Dust can get onto your hands, gloves, clothing, tools, phone, food, drinks, or cigarettes and eventually reach your mouth.

Follow the controls established for the work. Depending on the task, these may include containment, wet methods, HEPA-filtered equipment, respiratory protection, protective clothing, hygiene practices, and controlled cleanup. Wash before eating, drinking, or smoking, and prevent contaminated clothing and equipment from carrying lead into clean areas, vehicles, or homes. OSHA requires employers to assess potential employee exposure and establishes specific controls and protections based on the work and exposure.

For covered renovation work in pre-1978 housing and child-occupied facilities, EPA's RRP requirements also apply; that 1978 trigger should not be confused with the scope of OSHA's construction lead standard.

Lead awareness comes down to one rule: do not guess. Do not guess that a coating is lead-free, do not guess that the amount is too small to matter, and do not guess that feeling fine means you were not exposed. Know what you are disturbing, have unknowns properly evaluated, and use the controls established for the work before you create the dust.

DO

- Ask before disturbing older or unknown coatings.
- Make sure suspect materials are properly evaluated.
- Follow the lead controls established for the task.
- Wash before eating, drinking, or smoking.
- Keep lead contamination out of vehicles and homes.

DON'T

- Assume a coating is lead-free because of the building's age.
- Decide a material is safe by looking at it.
- Grind, sand, chip, cut, or blast unknown material without evaluation.
- Eat, drink, or smoke with contaminated hands.
- Carry contaminated dust home.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why can lead exposure occur without a worker realizing it?

   a) You usually cannot see, smell, or feel the exposure.

2. What are the two main ways lead enters a worker's body?

   a) Breathing it and swallowing it.

3. What should you do before disturbing an older or unknown coating?

   a) Have it properly evaluated and follow the established controls.

References: OSHA, 29 CFR 1926.62 — Lead; OSHA, *29 CFR 1926.62 Appendix B — Employee Standard Summary*; OSHA, *Lead: Evaluating Exposure and Controls;* OSHA CPL 02-02-058, *Lead Exposure in Construction — Inspection and Compliance Procedures*; EPA, *Renovation, Repair and Painting (RRP) Program.*

Talk Given By:	Date:
Company Name:	Location:
Printed Name	Signature

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, employers are responsible for providing a safe and healthy workplace and workers have rights. OSHA can help answer questions or concerns from employers and workers. OSHA's On-site Consultation Program offers free and confidential advice to small and medium-sized businesses, with priority given to high-hazard worksites. For more information, contact your regional or area OSHA office, call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), or visit www.osha.gov.

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