

Remodeling a Home Built Before 1978 Requires a Certified Lead Contractor by Phoebe Chongchua

Getting the lead out of your home may be tough to do, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). We've known for a long while now that lead paint is hazardous to our health. Lead paint can be very dangerous to children if they inhale or ingest it. It can cause damage to their brains and nervous systems. However, removing it may be difficult.

The NAHB says that a shortage of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) accredited trainers may stall some remodeling projects in homes where lead is present. A new regulation by the U.S. EPA goes into effect this month (April 22, 2010) that requires all contractors working in homes built before lead paint was banned in 1978 to be trained and certified under the Lead Paint: Renovation, Repair, and Painting Rule (LRRP).

"We've gotten the word out to our members and they understand the new requirements and are working hard to get certified by the deadline," said Donna Shirey, CGR, CAPS, CGP, president of Shirey Contracting in Issaquah, Wash., and 2010 chair of NAHB Remodelers in a recent press statement. The NAHB is doing its part to ensure that remodelers are ready, but it still might not be enough to meet the remodeling industry's needs. "Our local home building associations are offering certification classes to their members, but EPA hasn't approved enough trainers to enable our members and other contractors to be certified on time, and that's going to put remodelers and their customers in quite a bind."

The purpose of the regulation is to reduce the potential exposure to lead paint that may occur when a home that was built before 1978 is remodeled. The regulation isn't limited to just remodelers. Other contractors who must become certified include carpenters, plumbers, heating and air conditioning workers, and window installers. The NAHB is sending out a word of caution, since the EPA has approved only 135 training providers and certified about 14,000 renovators in lead-safe work practices. However, according to NAHB, the EPA's own estimates indicated that more than 200,000 contractors must be trained and certified.

NAHB writes in a press statement that the shortage of trainers can cause big problems for homeowners. "This will severely limit the number of remodelers able to work in older homes and will open the door to more fly-by-night contractors who will skip the training, skirt the law and put home owners at risk." "EPA must extend the deadline so that consumers can find trained and certified remodelers for their projects. I talked to a group of our West Virginia members who had to travel all the way to Atlanta to take the training sessions because there are no trainers in their own state," Shirey said.

The new regulation issued in 2008 is rapidly approaching the certification deadline for contractors. The regulation requires contractors to take an eight-hour training course which includes a PowerPoint presentation, hands-on training, and a 25-question quiz. The training is designed to show workers how to handle and contain hazardous lead-based debris. If lead-based debris/dust gets into the air and is breathed in or ingested, it can cause severe health issues.

According to the EPA, lead is more dangerous to children and can negatively impact their brains and nervous systems (which are more sensitive than adults). Also, children tend to absorb lead more easily because they frequently put their hands in their mouths.

Adults exposed to lead paint risk suffering from reproductive issues, nerve disorders, concentration problems, high blood pressure, joint pain, and more.

The EPA recommends that homeowners of homes built before 1978 have their homes inspected for any lead-based paint issues. Typically, lead-based paint that is not chipping and is in good condition is not hazardous to your health.

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