

:: Lead Awareness/Safety ::

Lead is a heavy, bluish metal, which occurs naturally in the earth. It is usually combined with two or more elements to form compounds. It is resistant to corrosion, is easily molded and shaped, and can be combined with other metals to form alloys.

It can be found in many commercial uses, such as storage batteries, paints and dyes, pencils, ammunition, fishing sinkers, and solder. You may sustain occupational exposure to lead in various ways, for instance, in the demolition or salvage of walls and structures; in the removal or encapsulation of materials; in new construction or alteration, repair, or renovation of houses; in firing range operations; or in any emergency cleanup of lead containing materials. You may also be exposed to lead if it is found in the soil, usually around roadways, older houses, mining areas, and industrial sites like incinerator plants, power plants and landfills.

Lead can affect numerous body systems, and causes forms of health impairment and disease which arise after periods of exposure. Chronic overexposure to lead may result in severe damage to your blood-forming, nervous, urinary, and reproductive systems. Some common symptoms of chronic overexposure include loss of appetite, metallic taste in the mouth, anxiety, constipation, nausea, pallor, excessive tiredness, weakness, insomnia, headache, nervous irritability, muscle and joint pain or soreness, fine tremors, numbness, dizziness, hyperactivity and colic.

The most common method of entry is through the inhalation of lead dust. Lead-based paint and other lead-containing materials are not always an immediate hazard. In fact, if lead-containing materials can be maintained in good condition, it is recommended that they be left alone with periodic surveillance performed to monitor their condition. It is only when lead-containing materials are disturbed or the materials become damaged that they become a hazard. When the materials become damaged, the lead-containing dust may then become airborne and inhaled or swallowed. When the materials can no longer be maintained in good condition, they pose a health risk. Removal may become the only option.

Do not sand, scrape, remove or drill into walls, ceilings or floors where lead might be present. To avoid lead exposure, never attempt to handle damaged lead-containing materials.

All work involving removal, repair, maintenance or cleanup of lead-containing material should be conducted by trained and certified workers in accordance with federal OSHA, state and local EPA regulations. Adherence to these regulations is important to assure protection of our health and the environment.