Testing Your Home for Lead in Paint, Dust, and Soil
About This Publication

This publication is for anyone who is considering having a home or residence tested for lead in paint, dust, or soil by a professional. It explains the technical aspects of lead testing without overwhelming the reader. Thus, commonly-asked questions are presented in logical order. The first section tells why you would test for lead, the approaches for testing for lead, and what information you will get from each approach. The second section answers specific questions about how paint, soil, and dust sampling are conducted by the professional in your home. Finally, the last section answers other questions about testing, including questions about home test kits and testing of water and ceramics.

Important:

This publication addresses federal regulations and guidelines. Your state may have its own lead program and different regulations. You can find out by calling the National Lead Information Center: 1-800-424-LEAD.
Section 1
General Questions
About Testing Procedures

Q: Why Should I Test My Home For Lead?

A: There are numerous reasons why you might want to test your home for lead, especially if built before 1978:

I. There are (or will be) children age 6 and younger in the home.

   Lead from paint, especially peeling or flaking paint, can get into dust and soil in and around a home. Young children may then swallow the lead during normal hand-to-mouth activity. In addition, an unborn child may be exposed to lead in the mother’s womb. High levels of lead in the fetus and in children age 6 and younger have been linked to nervous system damage, behavior and learning problems, and slow growth. Testing can tell you whether there is lead-based paint or a lead hazard in your home.

II. You are about to remodel, renovate or repaint your home.

   Any disturbance of lead-based paint can create a hazard by depositing lead chips or particles in the house dust or in the soil around the house. If you are planning on doing renovation, remodeling, or repainting, you should have testing done by a certified lead professional on any painted surfaces that will be removed, disturbed, scraped or sanded before starting the work. The EPA brochure Reducing Lead Hazards When Remodeling Your Home (see page 15) provides guidelines for renovating or remodeling your home.

III. You are a renter or buying a home.

   The new Federal Lead-Based Paint and Lead-Based Paint Hazards Disclosure Rule requires that the landlord or seller of a residential dwelling built prior to 1978 provide the renter or buyer with:

   - The pamphlet Protect Your Family From Lead In Your Home, and
   - Any available information on lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards in the home.

   A buyer must be given the opportunity to conduct testing to determine whether lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards are present. While you are not required by law to test for lead, it may be advisable if you have (or plan to have) young children in the home.
**IV. You are a landlord or selling a home.**

As discussed above, a homeowner is required to provide renters or buyers with any available information on lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards in homes built before 1978. Testing will give you the information that may be requested by potential renters or buyers.

**Why is Testing Recommended For Houses Built Before 1978?**

**Federal regulations placed a limit on the amount of lead in paint sold for residential use starting in 1978. That is why homes built before 1978 are subject to the Disclosure Rule. The older the home, the greater the chance of lead-based paint and lead hazards, and the more important it is to have the home tested.**

**What Kind Of Testing Do I Want?**

**Three different approaches for testing lead are available: a lead-based paint inspection, a risk assessment, and a lead hazard screen. A combination inspection and risk assessment may also be done. Selection of the approach depends on why you are testing.**

**I. Lead-Based Paint Inspection**

A lead-based paint *inspection* is a surface-by-surface investigation to determine whether there is lead-based paint in the home and where it is located.

An inspection includes:

- An inventory of all painted surfaces, including the outside as well as inside of the home. ‘Painted surfaces’ include all surfaces coated with paint, shellac, varnish, stain, coating or even paint covered by wall paper.
- Selection and testing of each type of painted surface.

Then you should get a report listing the painted surfaces in the home and whether each painted surface contains lead-based paint.

An inspection does not typically test painted furniture unless it is a permanent part of the home, such as kitchen or bathroom cabinets or built-in bookshelves. Soil, dust, and water are not typically tested during an inspection.

The presence of lead-based paint in a home does not necessarily mean there is a hazard to occupants. To make sure, you may want a different testing approach (either a risk assessment or hazard screen).
II. Risk Assessment

A risk assessment is an on-site investigation to determine the presence, type, severity and location of lead-based paint hazards. The presence of deteriorated lead-based paint or high levels of lead in dust or soil pose potential hazards to children who may ingest lead inside or playing outside.

A risk assessment includes:

- A visual inspection of the residence to determine the location of deteriorated paint, the extent and causes of the deterioration, and other factors that may cause lead exposure to young children inside or outside the home.

- Testing deteriorated paint and paint on surfaces where there is reason to believe (from teeth marks or from reports of a parent) that a child has chewed, licked or mouthed the paint. Painted surfaces in good condition are not tested.

- Testing household dust from floors and windows. Samples should include areas from a child’s bedroom, a child’s main play area, the main entrance, and other locations to be chosen by the Risk Assessor.

- Testing bare soil from play areas, the building foundation and possibly other areas around the home.

- Water testing is optional.

Finally, you should get a report identifying the location of the types of lead-based paint hazards and ways to control them. Because not all paint is tested, a risk assessment cannot conclude that there is no lead-based paint in the home.

### Typical painted surfaces tested during an inspection:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside the home</th>
<th>Outside the home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseboards</td>
<td>Heating units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built-in cabinets</td>
<td>Railings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceilings</td>
<td>Shelves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair rails</td>
<td>Stairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doors</td>
<td>Walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fireplaces</td>
<td>Windows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Floors</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimneys</td>
<td>Mail boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door trim</td>
<td>Porches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fascia, soffits</td>
<td>Roofing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fences</td>
<td>Siding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gutters, downspouts</td>
<td>Stairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handrails</td>
<td>Sheds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lattice work</td>
<td>Swing sets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An important point is that a risk assessment identifies current hazards. New hazards may arise if lead-based paint is disturbed, damaged, or deteriorates.

If you want to know which painted surfaces contain lead-based paint and whether any lead-based hazards are present, you will need a combination inspection and risk assessment.

III. Lead Hazard Screen

A lead hazard screen is a limited version of a risk assessment:

- Any painted surfaces in a deteriorated condition are tested.

- Two sets of dust samples are collected in a lead hazard screen. One set represents the floors and the other set represents the windows. Typically, there is less dust sampling in a lead hazard screen than in a risk assessment.

- Usually soil samples are not collected in a lead hazard screen, with one exception. If there is evidence of paint chips in the soil from previous exterior repainting, then the soil should be sampled and tested.

The outcome of the lead hazard screen is either:

- A conclusion that lead-based paint hazards are probably not present, or

- A recommendation that a full risk assessment be conducted to determine if such hazards are present.

In a lead hazard screen, only deteriorated paint is tested. Thus, a lead hazard screen cannot conclude there is no lead-based paint in the home.

A lead hazard screen is only recommended for residences that are generally in good condition, with little visible dust, and with paint in good condition (very little chipping or flaking). If not, the screen is likely to be a waste of time and money. In general, a lead hazard screen will be more useful in housing built after 1960.

As with a risk assessment, a lead hazard screen identifies current hazards. If there is lead-based paint in the home, new hazards may arise if that paint is disturbed, damaged, or deteriorates.

Who Can Do Lead Testing For Me?

It is strongly recommended that testing be performed by a certified Inspector or Risk Assessor.

- Inspectors can perform only lead-based paint inspections.

- Risk Assessors can perform both risk assessments and lead hazard screens. A person who is both an Inspector and a Risk Assessor may also do a combination of an inspection and a risk assessment.

Many states have requirements that Inspectors and Risk Assessors be certified by the state. If yours does, be sure to hire a state-certified professional.

If your state does not have a certification program, try to hire someone who is certified in another state.

If you cannot find someone with a state certification, check with the local public health department for a list of qualified Inspectors and Risk Assessors.

If there is no public health department list covering your area, try to hire an individual who...
has completed an EPA model course for Inspector and/or Risk Assessor. He or she will have a certificate documenting course completion.

The EPA pamphlet *Finding a Qualified Lead Professional For Your Home* provides guidelines for checking a professional’s background and experience. See page 15 for details on ordering informational materials.

A nationwide list of trained lead professionals, referred to as the Lead Listing, can be accessed through the Internet at: www.leadlisting.org. A state list can be obtained by calling 1-888-532-3547.

### What Will The Testing Report Tell Me?

That will depend on which approach has been used: inspection, risk assessment, or lead hazard screen. Request a sample report before the testing is done so that you may see what information will be provided and how it will be presented. You should also request that actual lead values be provided in the report (not just ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ classifications).

#### I. Inspection report

If you have an inspection done, you should receive a report that tells you which painted surfaces were tested and the test results for each surface. An inspection report will not tell you the condition of the lead-based paint or whether hazards exist.

#### II. Risk assessment report

If you have a risk assessment done, you will receive a report that tells you whether there are any lead-based paint hazards, and recommends ways to reduce or control any hazards present.

The Risk Assessor will take into account the test results and the results of the visual inspection to decide if there are any lead hazards and how to control them. Lead-based paint hazards identified include lead-based paint in deteriorated condition or on surfaces mouthed by a child. In addition, house dust or bare soil with hazardous lead levels will be identified. Refer to the EPA Fact Sheet *Identifying Lead Hazards in Your Home* as a way to understand the report of the Risk Assessor.

The Risk Assessor will provide a list of options for controlling each hazard. Options may include both interim controls and abatement.

- **Interim actions** - These are short term or temporary actions. Examples include recommendations to repair deteriorated surfaces that contain lead-based paint, to clean house dust more frequently, or to plant grass or shrubs in areas with bare soil.

- **Abatement** - These are long term or permanent actions. Examples include replacing old windows, building a new wall over an existing one, or removing soil.

The Risk Assessor will also identify the probable source of the paint deterioration and determine whether other repairs are warranted. For example, a water leak may need to be repaired to prevent further damage to the paint.

#### III. Hazard screen report

If you have a lead hazard screen done, the report tells you that there are probably no lead-based paint hazards in the house, or that full-scale risk assessment is needed.

**Do I Have To Do Anything After The Testing Is Completed?**

There is no EPA requirement for you to do anything to any lead-based paint or lead hazards found when testing your home. However, if your home was built before 1978, you will be required to provide the test results to any renter or buyer when you lease or sell the home. The EPA and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Fact Sheet *Disclosure of Lead-Based Paint Hazards in Housing* explains the responsibilities of sellers, landlords, and their agents when selling or leasing a home.
Be aware that there may be state or other requirements for action based on the test results. You can call the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD for information about what is required in your locality before you start testing.

If you decide to abate lead hazards, it is not recommended that you do the work yourself. Abatement activities must be done following careful procedures to prevent contamination of the home with lead dust. To be safe, hire a professional lead-based paint contractor (a professional who can do lead-based paint related abatement). Dust samples should be collected to check the thoroughness of the work.

Note that you are not under any obligation to hire the same firm that did the testing. In fact, it would be better to have one firm conduct all testing and another firm conduct the abatement work. That will prevent a conflict of interest.

Be sure to maintain a record of the work to help during any future sale or rental of the home.