

TECHNICAL ADVICE

HEALTH & SAFETY

Lead in paint



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What **LEAD ALERT - Lead is a health hazard so take it seriously!**
Most Australian residential dwellings built before 1970 were coated with paints that contained lead. Exposure to even small amounts of lead in old paint coatings presents a serious health risk, to both the occupant(s) and to any contractor, if and when the old paint coatings are disturbed by either hand or power tools.

Dangerous levels of lead may be present in paint dust, paint flakes or paint waste which if swallowed or inhaled, can be very harmful to humans.

Why Lead is a heavy metal poison that accumulates in the body. Children, pregnant women or nursing mothers should be kept well away from surfaces or areas where lead-paint is being disturbed and any contact with lead-paint dust and debris should be avoided. If exposure to lead has occurred or is suspected, then see a doctor for a blood test to determine what action is needed.

How does it occur Lead was used prior to 1970 as a primary pigment in house paints, industrial paints and automotive paints. It was also present in other additives. Lead containing ingredients are not normally capable of evaporating from the paint film. They remain quite safely locked in place as long as the paint film is not disturbed.

Once disturbed by dry sanding and/or scraping however, the dust and debris created will be lead contaminated, which must be contained and disposed of in accordance with established best practice.

The fine particles created by the sanding process, makes the lead more easily ingested by mouth and nose.

Solution **Before any maintenance work or surface preparation of old paintwork commences, thorough testing should firstly be carried out to detect if lead is present or not.**
If lead is detected, stringent precautions will need to be employed to prevent any contact with lead-paint dust and debris so engaging an MPA trained and qualified professional contractor is highly recommended.

“The six step guide to Painting Your Home (Third Edition)” published by the Australian Govt. provides basic information however simply reading this advice or any other advice does not provide the necessary training or skill set that is necessary to effectively carry out the lead paint hazard management process.



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The six steps are:

Solution

Step 1: Lead test - Find out if lead is present before work starts. Use a **lead test kit** to indicate if lead is present. More sophisticated scientific testing methods are also available from relevant authorities.

Step 2: Plan to stay safe – Contractors need to protect themselves, the occupants, the family pets and the surroundings at all times from exposure to lead contamination. Contractors will need to wear full PPE as per the guide.

Step 3: Protect the work area - Set up properly for the job at hand as detailed in the guide. Full containment of dust, debris, water and other contaminated materials is mandatory. All furniture and surroundings need to be well protected from lead contamination.

Step 4: Containment - Cover and/or remove the paint coatings that contain lead. Only use removal methods that do not create dust. Either wet sanding or chemical stripping are the accepted methods. Covering the lead containing paint with fresh layers of paint or with other building materials is also an acceptable solution to ensure that the lead is not disturbed.

Step 5: Clean-up - Some dust is inevitable so clean up correctly to minimise spread of lead contaminated waste and debris. HEPA vacuum cleaners are necessary as household vacuum cleaners are unsuitable and must not be used. Use a plastic spray bottle with water to dampen down dust and debris during clean up.

Step 6: Disposal - Lead contaminated waste and debris is hazardous and must be disposed of in accordance with government legislation. Please refer to the guide for details.

The guide provides advice on:

- *How to test for the presence of lead-based paint*
- *Instructions for removing old paint by proper methods using the right tools and equipment e.g. wet scraping, wet sanding, chemical stripping, or heat processes*
- *Looking after yourself – using protective clothing (coveralls, booties, hat, gloves) and a respirator (meeting the requirements of AS/NZS 1716)*
- *How to clean up thoroughly and correctly*
- *How to contain all lead contaminated waste*
- *How to dispose of this waste correctly*

Note: Do-it-yourself household lead test kits are available and can be purchased from paint distributors or trade paint shops. These kits provide an indication of whether lead is present or not however they are only guides and may not give a true or totally reliable reading. Accurate testing can be carried out by a qualified laboratory (costs may apply) using samples secured and supplied by a qualified contractor.

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Prevention To avoid contact with lead contaminated paint waste, refer to "The six step guide to Painting your Home". This guide highlights the unsafe work practices to avoid and the warnings to be aware of when renovating or repainting old dwellings.

The unsafe practices include:

- Do not dry sand or dry scrape by hand tool or by power tool.
- Do not sandblast or high pressure water wash/blast.
- Do not use heat guns or open flame burners to remove old paint.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke in the work area containing lead waste.
- Avoid working outside on wet or windy days when removing old paint.
- Remove and contain all contaminated clothing before leaving the work area.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before doing anything else.

Taking samples for testing

All paint samples extracted for testing must be handled in the safest possible way. **Plan to stay safe and proceed with caution.** Protect everyone including yourself, other occupants, the surroundings and importantly the laboratory staff who will also be handling these samples.

All suspect lead-paint flakes or dust must be carefully placed into a zip-lock plastic bag clearly labelled "**These paint flakes may contain lead**". The same message needs to appear on the paperwork sent with the samples for testing. Note: Please do not put the paperwork inside the bag with the flakes.

Forward the plastic bag with paint samples plus the paperwork in a large envelope addressed to the "Technical Services Supervisor" at Dulux® R&D Laboratory Clayton, Vic.

References The Australian Paint Manufacturers Federation (APMF) have fact sheets available on this subject which can be downloaded from the following website:

<http://www.apmf.asn.au/documents/leadinhousepaint.html>

The Australian Government produces a booklet free-of-charge called "**Lead alert - the six step guide to painting your home**" which can be downloaded from the following website: <http://www.environment.gov.au/atmosphere/airquality/publications/housepaint.html>

Please note that simply reading this bulletin however or the "Guide to Painting your Home" mentioned above or any other advice on Lead Management does not make anyone a "trained professional".

The Master Painters Association (MPA) in each state can provide a list of qualified professional contractors suitably trained in "**Lead paint hazard management**". These contractors are capable of undertaking the larger renovation or maintenance jobs using the correct equipment and safety procedures.

Contractors that are genuinely interested in adding this skill set to become a "trained professional" should contact the local Master Painters Association who offer specialist courses in Lead Paint Hazard Management. The MPA can be contacted by phone on Freecall: 1800 451 224 or via email on info@masterpainters.com.au

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