

ASK THE INSPECTOR COLUMN FOR SEPTEMBER 30, 2015
HEADLINE: LEAD PAINT; IS IT STILL A PROBLEM?

As we strive to make our homes more energy efficient, indoor contaminants are becoming a more conscious issue for many homeowners. Mold and asbestos are two examples, but one that is often ignored, especially in an older home is lead in the paint on walls and more likely in the windows, floors and door trim. If your home was built after the 70's, the likelihood that you have any amount of lead paint is slim, since lead paint was banned in paint by the mid 70's. If your home was built after the WW11, up to the 60's, however, you will likely have some levels, all be it likely very small. If your home was built before 1950, you can bet you have a greater concentration of lead paint in many areas of the home.

There has been a lot of concern about the lead in paint in years gone by and rightfully so in many cases. One comment made some years ago stated that a lead paint chip the size of a loonie contains enough lead to poison a child. While there is some truth to that, in reality, if a child were to swallow a solid paint chip this size, the chance that he/she would sustain any harm is slim, since their system would likely pass the chip. If, rather, a child under 4-6 years old inhaled the same volume of lead dust, that would be a problem. This is the difference and it is similar to asbestos in this way; it is the dust that is the major concern. Why children? An adult generally has a better understanding of health and hygiene and is not crawling on the floors and putting every thing in sight in their mouth. As one study noted, the human body is able to flush fine traces of lead out of the system. A child's brain, however, is not fully developed, which is biggest concern, along with the blood stream.

While there are areas of concerns, generally, if the paint in your home is stable you will likely have few problems, if any. Paint made up to the early 50's commonly had a major lead content, especially in some of the darker colors. Lead content was higher in semi-gloss and high gloss paints, the ones that were advertised as scrubbable. These were popular around windows, trim and walls and cabinets in kitchens and bathrooms.

What can you do? We have known for years that if an older home is kept clean then lead is generally not a problem. If you allow moisture and excess humidity to remain in the home, the result is peeling paints and with humidity older paint will deteriorate and leave a dust; here-in lays the concern. Any areas of the home where constant contact happens, older painted floors and stair treads, kitchen cabinets, even doors that bind, the friction will cause dust to appear. One thing about lead dust is that it is heavy and does not travel very far on its own. Some of the areas mentioned are usually where the concentrations will stay. If you are concerned about lead, go www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/contaminents/lead-plomb/asked-questions This is the Health Canada web site link for lead paint.

If you are concerned that you have lead paint that has deteriorated, it can be removed. If you have large concentrations, full disposable coveralls, disposable gloves and a

facemask with a HEPA filter is the dress code. If it is only window frames or a small area, a mask and disposable gloves should suffice. The secret for removal; do not sand!! You can use scrapers, keep the area wet with a pump sprayer or spray bottle. The only vacuum recommended is one that has a HEPA filter cartridge installed. Conventional vacuum cleaner filters are not fine enough. Work in small areas. Once you have scraped the paint off and this is slow tedious work, you should wash the area fully. Apply a strong, full strength spray detergent on a small area, and scrub down with a coarse rag. Ring the rag out in a bucket of warm water and, using a second rag from a clean bucket of hot water, rinse the area fully. There are some paint strippers that are also effective; be sure to follow the directions to the letter.

The federal government has a web site www.healthycanadians.gc.ca that has an excellent section on lead paint. Lead, like asbestos, is best left alone if it is stable. It is the dust particles that cause the problem. Make no mistake, lead poisoning is serious business and can have long-term health effects, particularly affecting the brain or nervous system. If you would like to do your own test, go to www.healthgoods.com and buy the 3M Instant Lead Check 8 Test Swab Kit. This is a contact type test kit and one of the most recognized available. Home Hardware has a kit that sells for 14.99, available at some stores and on line. Health Canada did put a warning out in 2007, however, on how inaccurate some of these kits are, so if you do your own testing and find lead, I would then have a professional lab do further testing as a confirmation. EMSL Labs is one of the most recognized in Canada. They have laboratories in Ottawa and Toronto in Ontario. Their web site is www.emslcanada.ca

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