

# Lead Safe Work Practices For DIY Renovators

By thediycoach

By Jerry R. Spumberg – The Do It Yourself Coach

*[A must read article about safety for every homeowner living in a home built before 1978.]*

If you are a DIYer working on your own home built before 1978, there may be health risks and a high exposure to legal liability issues due to lead paint. Before starting any project, you should be aware of the [United States EPA Lead Safe Practices Regulations](#). Because lead paint can be an extreme health hazard, these regulations put together a few years ago are now being enforced either by the EPA of the States, the Feds, or both!

This is not to dissuade you from tackling projects! It is quite the opposite! It is to inform you that there is knowledge that you need to acquire to use the required practices and to develop some learnable skills. This is no more difficult to do than any other learning and skills you have developed and less difficult than most. As a former builder and now a hands-on remodeling coach, I have been using similar remediation methods for years and am now engaged in educating my clients to follow these too.



The object of this article is to give you the direction to start your own self-educational program. In addition, I want to share with you my builder's layman's legal position [I am not a lawyer] that I believe there is the strong possibility of exposure to liability actions if you don't follow the regulations, even if you fall into the exempt category. At the end of the article, I will let you know how to get a lot of great and free information on-line from the EPA that includes their "Initial Training Course Student Manual"; I will also give my recommendations for a low cost set of training CDs that I have reviewed and am using to train my clients to work safely.

***My recommendations are my own opinions. I receive no financial benefit for them or any item I recommend to purchase. I advise that before you take on any project, you fully research this subject and develop your own conclusions of what is best for you. This article's sole purpose is to make you aware of the subject for your investigation and not to advise you in any manner on how to proceed or what to buy.***

You will learn as you investigate this subject about the need to rent or buy a Hepa vacuum that meets the Federal EPA's requirements for lead safety, the equipment needed for your particular project, test kits that the EPA has approved for testing to determine whether you have a problem or not, the protective clothing and dust masks to protect yourself and those that may be working with you, and the proper procedures. You will also be exposed to the EPA's required record keeping for contractors. Much of this information in detail will be found in the resources found at the end of this article. Even though you as the home owner are exempt under the regulations, after your investigation, you may conclude to abide by them as I am recommending to my clients.

Lead that enters the body when it is swallowed or inhaled in the form of paint chips, particles, or dust is extremely toxic and can cause many types of illnesses. This is commonly known as lead poisoning. In children under the age of six, it can affect the brain and the developing nervous system that can result in reduced I.Q., learning disabilities, and behavioral problems. Even children who appear healthy can have dangerous levels of lead in their body that lead to a numerous list of illnesses that we don't have space to cover. Lead is harmful to adults as well. Even at low levels, it can lead to high blood pressure, affect our bones and organs in both males and females and the fetus of pregnant women. Simply put, this is one bad heavy metal when it gets into our bodies. *(Interesting side note: There are some archeological studies that conclude that part of the reason for the fall of the "Roman Empire" was due to the use of lead pipes in their water supply and the taking of lead powder for medicinal purposes that caused the population a variety of illnesses, including birth defects and a lowering of intellect. )*

In normal hand to mouth activities such as eating, playing, or disturbing dust by normal movements [such as cleaning or vacuuming], if there is exposed lead paint within the environment, there is a good possibility of people having lead within their bodies. When performing renovation activities such as sawing, sanding, brushing, burning, and demolition that disturb lead based painted surfaces, there is a strong risk to lead exposure if you haven't taken the proper precautions. If you had a packet of lead dust the size of a single packet of sugar, the amount contained can contaminate many rooms in a home with a enough lead to cause serious illness.



These regulations assume that all houses built before 1978 contain lead-based paint. It is your responsibility to test, prove, and document its absence if you are disturbing 6 square feet within the interior of the house or 20 square feet of the exterior. The rules also require it for any activity that involves window replacement, demolition, or activities involving prohibitive practices within these smaller areas as well.

After I posted my last article “ **The New Regulatory Climate for D.I.Y. Home Remodelers** ” the questions started coming in. To sum up the three most frequently asked questions:

- Do the practices required add on a lot of cost if I just hire a contractor to the job? The simple answer, Yes.
- Can homeowners learn how to follow these practices and can they do this work themselves? Answer, yes.
- Do the regulations apply to a homeowner working on his own house? The answer is no, but here is the catch and it's a big one.

First, there is the health risk to themselves, family, children, friends, future buyer, and anyone that comes in the house during and after the work, without following the mandated practices.

Second, even when a trade contractor follows the prescribed practices, they must keep a record thru documentation about what and how the job was done. They are also required to retain those records for a period of time in their possession. Keep in mind, even when you do a great job, in this litigious society, anyone can file a suit against anyone for lead poisoning that has been near or in the house.

Even though under “The RRP Rule: Exclusions” [page 2-3 of their model training guide] it lists “Renovations performed by homeowners in their own homes”, here's the rub as summed up with a discussion with a legal eagle. If you haven't followed the prescribe methods and documented them in accordance to the rules and someone was in your house during or after, came to the front door or worked outside or bought your house and they sued you having found traces of lead in their body, the Eagle could have a tough time defending you.

Health concerns over lead paint and the possibility of generating lead dust and contamination during painting and remodeling of projects in homes built before 1978 have created the enactment of strict methods of remediation and detailed record keeping by the Federal EPA and State governments. Compliance is not an option any longer for contractors, as it was when Congress passed the legislation just a short time ago, where under certain conditions a homeowner could opt out of these costly regulations. The EPA has recently removed this option. Whether this was legal or not will eventually be settled in the courts.

Hopefully at this point I have your attention. When contractors do work for you, they add on a significant cost to cover overhead and profit. If you are a reader of [www.remodelingreports.com](http://www.remodelingreports.com) or [www.thediycoachusa.com](http://www.thediycoachusa.com), you already understand what the costs are and why. The methods prescribed are tedious and time consuming, but only require a moderate level of skill and knowledge which are easily mastered. A knowledgeable person who is certified in the requirements can cut down your learning curve substantially as your confidence and competence grows. The cost savings can be dramatic in this area and make projects financially feasible for DIYers, that may not be the case when using contractors.

Without going into a lot of detail, I will list below many of the subjects within “Lead Safety for Renovation, Repairs and Painting” that you will want to learn about. These subjects are the “Course Agenda” within the EPA's “Certified Renovators Initial Training Course Student Manual:

1. Why Should I Be Concerned About Lead Paint
2. The Regulations
3. What To Do Before Beginning Work
4. Containing Dust During The Work
5. During the work [methods and practices]
6. Cleaning Activities and Checking Your Work
7. Recordkeeping
8. Training Non-certified Workers

Before beginning to read the manual, you should go to Appendix 3 (“Renovate Right: Important Lead Hazard Information for Families, Child Care Provider and Schools”) and Appendix 5 (“Steps to Lead Safe Renovation, Repair and Painting”). These are copies within the training manual of the EPA Pamphlets that contractors are required to give to clients. They are a great introduction to the subject as well as a motivator to get you to learn more.

**The manual can be found by going to <http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/epahudrrmodel.htm>**

I’m sure you understand the saying that a picture can be worth a 1000 words. In this case, a good CD that teaches about the subject and visually demonstrates the methods by an expert, can be worth a whole text book plus it cuts the learning curve significantly. I’ve been recommending to my clients a video titled “**Lead Safe Work Practices For Employees of EPA Certified Renovators**” with Francis Xavier “Rich” Finigan. I purchased my copy recently thru <http://www.check4lead.com> for about \$30. It also contains an additional CD of forms to document your work. I feel that this was money well spent. I use it to train my people, saving us both a lot of time. It may also be available thru other websites.

If you have an old house and plan to take on many projects over a period of time, you may consider taking the certification course similar to the one I took. In New Jersey, it is often available through a state program at community or public colleges or private certified schools. It takes no more than a few days and normally runs a few hundred dollars. Not a bad way to go.

Since homeowners working on their own project are exempt under the regulations, and if you still agree with the reasoning of this article, there is another way to go. That way is to have a lead certified remodeling coach guide you through the How To until you reach a point that you are confident with your understanding and the methods. I teach this in the prescribed method that I would teach my own non-certified renovation workers. In addition, he should show you what he does in documenting the work. This can all be done right on the projects site.

Once you understand what’s involved, I think you will agree that ethical contractors who abide by the regulations, because of all of the health concerns for everyone, must add on significant cost when lead based paint is present. However, if you are physically able home owners with only rudimentary skills, your investigation may also conclude that you can handle this work along with your next project with some guidance from a knowledgeable person and save a bundle of dollars.

The DIY Coach is a Lead Safe Certified Expert.

