

Final Lead Chemical Action Plan

The Washington Departments of Ecology and Health are recommending actions to protect human health and the environment from lead in the Lead Chemical Action Plan (CAP). Along with the valuable help of other agencies and a diverse group of stakeholders, the plan was developed to identify the dangers of lead, where it can be found in the environment, describe how people and animals are exposed and recommend ways to reduce its harm. The Lead CAP is a planning tool to guide statewide efforts. It is not a new law or regulation.

Priority Recommendation

While all the recommendations are important, addressing lead-based paint in older homes is the top priority. Children are the largest and most vulnerable group affected by lead, and lead-based paint is the most frequent cause of childhood lead poisoning.

Actions to address lead-based paint are:

- Require remediation in rental housing after a confirmed lead poisoning when housing (for example, paint or plumbing) is the source of lead.
- Require landlords to assess lead hazards in pre-1960 rental housing.
- Develop guidelines for individuals to assess their own homes for lead hazards.

Other Actions

Ecology and other agencies will implement other actions as resources and opportunities allow.

Recommendations to prevent lead exposure:

- Update educational materials and outreach activities to reflect more current research about harmful effects at lower levels of lead exposure.
- Reassess the cleanup levels for lead and lead-related standards in our rules and permits.
- Implement the new U. S. Environmental Protection Agency Renovation, Repair and Painting Rule to help prevent exposures to children and workers when lead-based paint is disturbed
- Survey businesses statewide to identify current uses and potential occupational exposures, to help us update the occupational standards for workers.
- Encourage businesses to take advantage of existing programs that can assist them to reduce the use of lead and comply with occupational standards.
- Work with stakeholders to voluntarily reduce or phase out the use of products that create direct exposure to people or wildlife, especially when there are readily available alternatives.

Recommendations to address lead exposures that have already occurred:

- Screen more children for risk factors and test more children for blood lead level, with an emphasis on the populations at greatest risk.
- Modify medical removal levels for workers to reflect our understanding of lead's health effects.

Summary of changes in the Final Lead CAP

The public comment period for the Draft Lead Cap ran from August 6 – October 6, 2008. Many comments on the Draft for the Lead CAP were received by email, letter, phone, and at public meetings. All comments were reviewed and considered carefully by both Ecology and Health and changes were made accordingly in light of those comments. We appreciate the time and effort each commenter took to review the draft, develop comments and submit them. It is obvious that the issue of lead in our environment is important to Washington's citizens.

There are many changes between the Draft Lead CAP and the Final Lead CAP. Most of the changes either added new information or clarified existing information. We added new information from comments, if we could verify the information. Our conclusions and recommendations remained the same.

Why Lead?

Lead is very toxic and is on the list of chemicals considered to be "the worst of the worst." These chemicals are referred to as "PBTs" because they:

- remain (persist) in the environment for a long time,
- build up (bioaccumulate) in the bodies of humans and animals, and
- they can be very harmful (toxic), even in small doses, especially to children

Lead affects many parts of the body and can cause many different types of health problems in both people and wildlife. Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of the bluish-grey metal that is used in an increasing number of products. There is no known safe level of lead exposure for children. Everyone has some exposure to lead, and harmful effects can occur from relatively common everyday exposures. Adverse health effects of lead can be permanent, so preventing exposures is critical. While exposure to lead-based paint is the most frequent cause of lead poisoning in children, many other lead-containing sources have also been associated with elevated blood lead levels.

Lead uses and releases

In the past, lead was used extensively in paints, gasoline, plumbing and pesticides. Exposure to old lead-based paint is the most frequent cause of lead poisoning in children today. While many uses of lead have been phased out, lead is still found in many new products, leaving the potential for exposure to workers, consumers, or the environment. Lead is relatively inexpensive and very versatile.

The largest use of lead currently is for automotive lead-acid batteries. Computers, solder and other alloys (including brass plumbing fixtures), vinyl, ammunition, fishing tackle, wheel weights, optical glass, and stained glass also use lead.

Lead is released into the environment by large sources such as industrial facilities. The largest industrial releases in Washington are from mining, the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, military bases, and large energy users such as pulp and paper mills and concrete manufacturers.

Disposing of lead products is another way people and animals are exposed. For example, lead in landfills can leach out to wastewater treatment plants and be released in wastewater or sewage sludge.

More information

Ecology's website: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov>

PBTs, including other chemicals on the PBT list and past CAPs for Mercury and PBDEs: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/pbt/>

Lead Chemical Action Plan: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/pbt/lead.html>

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