Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
Lead Based Paint Hazard Reduction Program

Lead Contamination Facts

Regulated clearance levels for lead dust on surfaces are:

40 micrograms per square foot on floors
250 micrograms per square foot on interior window sills
400 micrograms per square foot in window troughs or wells

To illustrate how small an amount of lead this really is, consider this:

A penny weighs 2.8 grams or 2,800 milligrams or 2,800,000 (2.8 million) micrograms. If that penny was converted to pure lead dust, there would be enough lead to contaminate 70,000 square feet of floor space or 700 10'x10' rooms at the 40 microgram per square foot clearance level.

The OSHA permissible exposure limit (PEL) for any worker occupationally exposed to lead in air is 50 micrograms of lead per 8-hour (time-weighted average) work day. The same penny converted to lead dust would be enough to occupationally expose a worker at the PEL for 56,000 work days or over 153 years of 8 hour work days.

Any paint is considered lead-based paint at a level of 1.0 milligrams of lead per square centimeter or higher, or if it is greater than .5% lead by weight, or if it contains greater than 5,000 Parts Per Million of lead. Prior to 1950, paint contained as much as 50% lead by weight. Paint in good condition poses little risk, however paint that is peeling or deteriorated is especially hazardous. Dust created from remodeling an older home can also be a significant source of lead. Anyone performing an activity that disturbes lead paint and creates dust should first think about how little lead can cause a large amount of contamination especially when you consider the following:

An average 2 story home with approximately 3000 sq. ft. of exterior paint with a lead content of 20.0 milligrams per square centimeter would have about 122 pounds of lead in the paint or more than a half ounce of lead per square foot. (equivalent to almost 7 pennies of weight per square foot)