

Salvaged Building Components: The Hidden Danger to You and Your Family

Reusing or recycling architectural components from old buildings is an excellent way to reduce the waste stream, but beware: you could be bringing a source of lead into your home. Prior to 1978, lead was used in paint, varnishes, and other finishes. While not all salvaged components contain lead, as a general rule, the older the component is, the more likely it is to contain lead. When old doors and windows are chemically stripped of paint, enough lead can remain in the wood to cause lead poisoning. Lead poisoning in children is especially dangerous because it can cause serious neurological and developmental problems. Children and adults with elevated blood lead levels frequently will exhibit no outward symptoms.

- 1. When in doubt, assume salvaged components contain lead until testing can prove otherwise.**
- 2. Always use lead-safe work practices to minimize the spread of dust and contamination. Avoid cutting, sanding, grinding, burning, or any other activity that might create airborne dust.**
- 3. Keep children away from any component with visible paint deterioration, or any chemically stripped component.**

Does stripping the paint off make the component safe?

No! Chemical stripping liquefies paint layers, allowing lead to absorb deeply into the pores of the wood. Sanding a component with no visible paint can contaminate your entire home if you don't use lead-safe work practices. (These practices are described in a free booklet—see below.)

Does repainting the component make it safe?

Generally, a repainted component is safer as long as the paint is kept intact. Components that experience friction with use like windows, doors, and drawers are more likely to release lead as the friction grinds the paint off.

How can I tell if a component might contain lead?

The only sure way to tell is to have the component tested. There are three methods:

- 1) Instant lead test chemical swabs**, available at hardware stores, are the cheapest and fastest way to determine whether lead is present. The swab should be used in an area where all of the paint layers are exposed because it is not uncommon for the older lead paint to be covered by a newer non-lead paint layer.
- 2) X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analyzers** can determine lead content but are fairly expensive and need to be used by properly trained and certified inspectors.
- 3) Laboratory analysis** of paint chips provides the most accurate results, but you have to send a chip to the lab and wait for the analysis results.

What can I do to be safe?

Follow the work practices described in the free publication, *Lead Paint Safety: A Field Guide for Painting, Home Maintenance, and Renovation Work*. Vermont residents can get a free copy by [e-mail request](mailto:rripp@vhcb.org) to: rripp@vhcb.org or by calling (802) 828-5064. You can also download a copy of the guide from the internet: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/lead/training/LBPguide.pdf>

For more information, contact the Vermont Lead Hazard Reduction Program
Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, 149 State Street, Montpelier, Vt. 05602
Call: **1-800-290-0527** or visit the website: **www.leadSAFEvermont.org**