

Background

What is lead?

Lead is a very versatile heavy metal, used with many elements to create useful things. Despite its versatility, lead is very toxic and has been poisoning workers for thousands of years.

Lead-based paint has been banned in USA households since 1978, but unfortunately that does not mean you are safe.

In construction lead is present in roofs, cornices, tank linings and electrical conduits. Lead-based paint is still being used on bridges, railways, ships, lighthouses and other steel structures for its ability to inhibit rusting and corrosion of iron and steel.

Workers with a higher risk for lead poisoning include, iron workers, demolition workers, welders, abatement workers, plumbing workers and more.



Dangers

Why should lead toxicity be taken seriously?

Lead exposure can damage the central nervous system, cardiovascular system, reproductive system, hematological system and kidneys.

Levels of overexposure:

- **Short term (acute):** can cause a condition called encephalopathy that effects the brain, causing seizures, coma, death from cardiorespiratory arrest
- **Extended, long-term (chronic):** causes severe damage to the brain, can also damage urinary, blood-forming and reproductive system

Symptoms of chronic overexposure:

- Loss of appetite
- Constipation
- Nausea
- Excessive tiredness
- Headache
- Fine tremors
- Colic with severe abdominal pain
- Metallic taste in mouth
- Weakness

Lead Safety

Due to its prevalence in the construction field, lead safety should be held to a high regard always.

- Always assume that all painted surfaces contain lead
- Always wear proper respiratory protection when performing hot works near a painted surface
- Paint must be abated a minimum of 4"-6" away from hotwork
- Post signs near any kind of work being performed around lead
- No smoking
- Wash your hands thoroughly before eating
- Unless performing the work, stay away from any lead work areas
- Do not eat near a lead work area