

Lead Safety

More than 900,000 construction workers are exposed annually to lead hazards, according to OSHA. Construction workers have some of the highest blood lead levels. In construction, the main sources of lead exposure are torch cutting, abrasive blasting, stripping, sanding, heating and other work that disturbs surfaces coated with lead-based paint.

Health Hazards

Lead is toxic if you breathe or swallow it. Large amounts of inhaled or ingested lead can cause severe anemia, harm reproductive function and damage the kidneys, brain and nervous system. The first symptoms of severe lead poisoning may be an upset stomach (or cramps), weakness, joint pain and fatigue. However, not all people with lead poisoning have noticeable symptoms.



Protect Yourself

- ◆ If you're working with or near a painted surface that will be disturbed, ask your supervisor if the paint contains lead. The OSHA Hazard Communication Standard requires your supervisor/contractor to train you if you will be exposed to a lead hazard.
- ◆ Until you're sure that there's not a lead hazard, act as if there is one and protect yourself.
- ◆ If you must work with a lead hazard, or the possibility of one, use wet methods, if you can, to keep down any dust.
- ◆ Before you use a torch for cutting, safely remove lead paint. Heating lead paint will produce lead fumes.
- ◆ Use long-handled torches to keep your distance.
- ◆ Use local-exhaust ventilation.
- ◆ Use the correct respirator for the job.
- ◆ Never smoke, eat or drink around work with lead surfaces.
- ◆ Always wash your hands and face to remove any lead dust before smoking, eating, drinking or going to the bathroom.
- ◆ Never wear your work clothes home. Lead dust on your clothes and shoes can poison your family, especially children.
- ◆ Have your blood lead level checked often. OSHA requires your employer to have your blood tested for lead if you're exposed to it. If your blood lead level is above 50 micrograms per deciliter, your employer must give you a different job away from lead until you're well; and your employer must arrange for your medical examinations.