



ANGIE'S LIST SHOPS THE MARKET; FINDS LEAD-PAINT MISINFORMATION & VIOLATIONS

By Jo Becker, Education/Outreach Specialist, Fair Housing Council of Oregon

Last fall angieslist.com published a very interesting article for their subscribers entitled "LEAD: Still Lurking." This month I'd like to share some salient points from that article with you.

ARM YOURSELF WITH INFORMATION

Homeowners can't rely on contractors and their local hardware store to know their stuff where lead paint is concerned.

What follows is portions of the Angie's List article by Paul Pogue with additional reporting by Kaley Belakovich, Oseye Boyd, James Figy, Staci Giordullo, Garrett Kelly, Lacey Nix, Michael Schroeder, Stephanie Snay, and Cynthia Wilson.

Angie's List takes lead paint seriously. That's why they decided to conduct a "secret shopper" program this year to test contractors and hardware stores about

their knowledge of lead safety.

It's been four years since the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) implemented its Renovation, Repair, and Painting (RRP). Did awareness about the dangers of lead increase? Maybe. Are contractors passing along good advice about lead safety? Not always.

While interviewing candidates for the project, the last thing a consumer expects to hear is: "It's just a bunch of B.S., really." However, that's exactly what one contractor told one of Angie's List reporters.

Angie's List contacted 150 randomly selected painters, remodelers and window contractors, and 50 hardware stores, in 10 major cities telling them a 2-year-old child's room in a 1920s house was being renovated. What, they asked, were the proper methods to strip paint or replace windows? Nearly 11% of those contractors, and 47% of hardware stores, gave poor advice. Here are a few examples:

- "Lead only harms you if you eat it."
- "Just close the door, wear a mask."
- "You might just be able to throw [lead paint debris] in the trash."
- "The whole lead thing is very overblown unless your kids are chewing or gnawing on the windowsills."

While lead-safety awareness has increased, homeowners can't rely on contractors and their local hardware store to know their stuff where lead paint is concerned. Your best defense? Arm yourself with information.

Sadly, Angie's List staff found that a significant number of those renovation contractors — nearly 11 percent — offered consumers bad advice when it comes to lead safety. But even more disconcerting, nearly 32 percent of those contractors told us they did not have the required EPA lead-safety certification.

Every lead-painted surface contains invisible poison, easily unleashed by scraping, sanding, or melting the surface — all common techniques in renovations. Lawmakers banned lead-based paint in 1978 but contractors working in older properties operated with very little regulation until the EPA

KNOW THE RISKS

Lead paint lurks in nearly half the nation's homes. Here are several risk factors to consider, according to the EPA and highly rated lead testers:

- About 38 million homes in the US, representing 40% of the residential housing stock, contain lead-based paint.
- Any home build before 1978 might still have lead paint. And the chances increase the older the home.
- Window and door frames often contain lead even when the rest of the home doesn't, and they present particular dangers. Friction or impact surfaces such as door frames, stairs, and windows can break down the paint during normal use and release lead into the home. Some ceramic tile in pre-1978 homes also contains lead, which might be released if the tiles are removed or broken.
- Deteriorated paint presents a significant hazard, as it releases paint chips and lead dust. Even small amounts of dust — not just chips — can easily be ingested by young children.
- Soil can become contaminated when exterior lead paint flakes or peels off.

instituted the RRP Rule in 2010.

Nationwide, about 40 percent of the housing stock remains at risk for lead paint, according to the EPA. Angie's List estimates that number may be higher for its members as 46 percent of them report living in a pre-1978 home.

According to Wendy Cleland-Hamnett, director of the EPA's office of pollution prevention and toxics, "Our certified firms mentioned that they sometimes have to compete with firms underbidding jobs because that firm is uncertified and is willing to work without lead-safe work practices," she says. "Those firms may be skirting other requirements as well."

In the past year, Cleland-Hamnett says the EPA stepped up its enforcement efforts against noncompliant firms or individuals.

Going an additional step further to protect their members, Angie's List excludes any contractor who performs this type of work and fails to provide proof of EPA certification from this service category and keyword searches. In addition, the site includes a notice on the company's profile to alert their members of the issue.

"Correct practices are very easy to spot," according to Ron Peik, owner of a highly rated lead-paint remediation company in Mass. "You should be seeing lots of plastic being set up to contain the area, literally taped down so air doesn't get in, and windows, ducts and doorways sealed off. Homeowners really should insist on looking at the containment before actual work is executed."

The most important thing owners of pre-1978 homes can do is hire certified contractors on jobs that disturb lead paint, and verify that the contractor follows the law.

Angie's List also offers a Lead-Safe Practices Checklist to protect yourself and your property. You can find it at www.angieslist.com/articles/lead-safe-practices-checklist.htm and additional resources at www.angieslist.com/articles/lead-paint-safety-what-you-need-know.htm.

For help with your own, specific lead questions, call the free Leadline at 503/988-4000.

A reminder that although lead poisoning is especially dangerous for kids, the fear of lead poisoning or liability does not give housing providers the right to deny or discourage families with children away from pre-1978 housing. Familial status is a protected class under federal fair housing law¹ and doing anything

¹ Federally protected classes under the Fair Housing Act include: race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status (children), and disability. Oregon law also protects marital status, source of income, sexual orientation, and domestic violence survivors. Additional protected classes have been added in particular geographic areas; visit www.FHCO.org for more information.

LEAD REQUIREMENTS

In '96 federal regulation was passed requiring housing providers to disclose to potential buyers and occupants that pre-'78 residences may contain lead-based paint before the consumer was obligated by contract. This involved distribution of a "Protect Your Family from Lead In Your Home" brochure and signatures a disclosure form.

The RRP regulation was layered on top of the '96 law, requiring those doing work that disturbs at least six square feet of painted surfaces inside pre-'78 homes (or 20 square feet on the exterior) provide residents with the "Renovate Right" brochure and complete another accompanying disclosure form.

Two years later EPA went on to stipulate that those doing such work must be certified (or hire someone who is) and follow specific work practices to prevent lead contamination.

The following work methods are specifically prohibited because they have been proven to create significant levels of lead dust:

- dry sanding or scraping,
- removing paint by torching or burning,
- the use of heat guns over 1100°F, and
- machine-sanding or grinding without HEPA equipment.

Specialized paint strippers are available instead; some even render lead non-hazardous further decreasing risk to workers and residents.

Safe work practice requirements include, among other things, posting of signage during the project; the use of plastic sheeting to seal and prevent contamination outside the work area; and proper disposal of lead-based paint waste.

to deny or discourage otherwise qualified families is illegal. Visit www.FHCO.org for more information on this topic.

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