

Lead hazards

The Control of Lead at Work Regulations 2002 and their associated Approved Code of Practice, together with guidance notes and information from industry bodies, enable employers to understand the legal duties placed upon them by the regulations, and to take the appropriate actions to protect the health and safety of their employees who have to work with lead.

Clients have a duty to identify lead hazards before a project commences. One way to do this is an incremental three-stage approach, involving preliminary indicative do-it-yourself testing with a simple chemical test, followed by limited professional paint-on-base-material analysis and/or a full lead survey.

Old, lead-based paint and dust are still likely to affect the majority of UK buildings, although lead paint was completely removed from retail sale by 1992. If there is a possibility that workers will be exposed to lead, then the employer should assess the risk to their health and decide what precautions are needed.

Exposure to lead, lead dust and fumes constitutes a major and widely underestimated hazard to the health of those whose work involves lead, lead products and lead-containing materials (LCMs). These include lead-based paint or leaded exhaust particle contamination in lofts and roof voids, known as ceiling dust.

Lead paint and consequent dust exposure risks are greatest within pre-1970 buildings and structures, and especially during repair, maintenance, refurbishment and demolition if proper precautions are not followed. The build-up of lead dust contamination in lofts and roof, ceiling and floor voids continued until the general sale of leaded petrol became illegal in 2000.



Construction workers at risk from exposure to lead:

- Those carrying out blast removal and burning of old lead paint.
- Those stripping old lead paint from doors, windows and so on.
- Those carrying out surface preparation of previously lead-painted surfaces. Even stripped surfaces can contain significant lead residues.
- Those stripping old wallpaper and disturbing underlying lead-based paint.
- Demolition operatives involved in hot cutting in demolition and dismantling operations.
- Plumbers working on lead flashing, upstands and gutters.
- Operatives handling old, architectural lead work.
- Anyone involved in structural renovation or refurbishment, including conservation or heritage projects.

Employers' duties under the regulations

An employer who is working with lead or LCMs has to protect anyone who may be affected by the work (as well as their own employees) from exposure. Every employer is required to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risk to the health and safety of employees while at work. This includes other people who are not employees, but those who may be exposed as a result of the way the employer carries out the work concerned. This includes:

- the workers of other employers, including those not involved in work with lead (such as maintenance staff and cleaners)
- visitors to the work site
- the families of those who are exposed to lead at work, who may become affected by lead carried home unintentionally on the clothing and footwear of the employee
- the occupiers of premises, including private dwellings, irrespective of whether the occupiers are present whilst the work is carried out or re-occupy the premises later.

Further information

- *Control of lead at work (third edition)* (free online Health and Safety Executive publication).

CITB has made every effort to ensure that the information contained within these documents is accurate. The content should be used as guidance only and not as a replacement for current regulations, existing standards or as a substitute for legal advice and is presented without any warranty, either express or implied, as to their accuracy. In no event will CITB be liable for any damages arising from reliance upon the content.