

TOOLBOX TALK NO.37 Lead



Old lead based paint and dust are still likely to affect the majority of UK buildings, although lead paint was completely removed from general sale by 1992.

Exposure to lead, lead dust and fumes constitutes a major and widely under-estimated hazard to the health of those whose work involves lead, lead products and lead-containing materials.

They can become a significant exposure risk if lead dust, fumes or vapour are not prevented or adequately controlled. Any work involving lead must be in accordance with the Control of Lead at Work Regulations.

Exposure to lead

There has been an overall reduction in the number of British workers under medical surveillance for work with lead over the past decade. Women have consistently accounted for a small proportion of the total under surveillance, and the number of young people (under 18 years) under surveillance remains very low. The number and proportion of workers with higher levels of blood-lead concentrations have decreased substantially over the past decade.

Lead is not absorbed through the skin – except in the form of lead alkyls (an additive to petrol) and lead naphthenate. Any lead you absorb at work will circulate in your blood. Your body gets rid of a small amount of lead each time you go to the toilet, but some will stay in your body, stored mainly in your bones. It can stay there for many years without making you ill

How does lead affect your health?

If the level of lead in your body gets too high, it can cause:

- headaches
- tiredness
- irritability
- constipation
- nausea
- stomach pains
- anaemia
- loss of weight

Continued uncontrolled exposure could cause more serious symptoms such as:

- kidney damage
- nerve and brain damage
- infertility

These symptoms can also have causes other than lead exposure so they do not necessarily mean that you have lead poisoning.

You should make sure you follow good work practices and a high standard of personal hygiene.

**SAFETY AS
STANDARD**

When are you most at risk?

When you work in industrial processes which create lead dust, fume or vapour. These include:

- blast removal and burning of old lead paint;
- stripping of old lead paint from doors, windows etc.;
- hot cutting in demolition and dismantling operations
- recovering lead from scrap and waste.
- lead smelting, refining, alloying and casting;
- lead-acid battery manufacture and breaking and recycling;
- manufacturing lead compounds;
- manufacturing leaded-glass;
- manufacturing and using pigments, colours and ceramic glazes;
- working with metallic lead and alloys containing lead, for example soldering;
- some painting of buildings
- some spraying of vehicles
- Recycling of televisions or computer monitors which contain Cathode Ray Tubes (CRT's)

Your body absorbs lead when you:

1. Breathe in lead dust fume or vapour
2. Swallow any lead for example if you eat, drink, smoke or bite you nails without washing your hands and face.

What you should do to protect your health

- Make sure you have all of the information and training you need to work safely with lead
- Use all of the equipment provided by your employer and follow the instructions for use
- Make sure all protective equipment fits correctly and is in good condition
- Keep your immediate work area clean and tidy
- Clear up and get rid of any lead waste at the end of the day
- Do not take home any protective clothing or footwear for washing or cleaning
- Wear any necessary protective equipment or clothing and return it to the proper place provided by your employer
- Report any damaged or defective equipment to your employer
- Only eat and drink in designated areas that are free from lead contamination
- Keep any medical appointments with the doctor where you work
- Practice a high standard of personal hygiene: Wash your hands and face and scrub your nails before eating
- Wash and/or shower before you go home
- Make sure your colleagues know and understand the dangers exposed to lead.

All exposed surfaces in areas where lead paint stripping or removal has taken place, should be washed down thoroughly, either with a proprietary lead-specific detergent or with a solution of dishwasher detergent in hot water, and then wiped down again with clean water.