



National Center for Healthy Housing

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EPA Lead Dust Standards Inadequately Protect Children

Columbia, Maryland – According to the National Center for Healthy Housing, a non-profit research institute, the current standards established by EPA to protect children from lead paint hazards in housing are nearly four times too high.

Lead dust generated from old lead paint and contaminated soil is the primary source of exposure for young children. Since 2001, EPA has set standards for lead in dust and soil in housing. When homes are tested for lead dust by a certified risk assessor or sampling technician they must meet these standards to be considered “safe.”

However, a series of analyses completed by the National Center for Healthy Housing and announced today show that the current EPA standards leave more than 30 percent of children at risk of lead poisoning.

“There is no requirement that EPA routinely update its lead dust standards in housing. As a result, the current standards have become antiquated and no longer reflect what we know about the levels of lead exposure that cause harm,” said Rebecca Morley, executive director of the National Center for Healthy Housing

NCHH found that the floor dust standard (currently 40 micrograms per square foot) is four times what it should be to be protective. Lowering the floor dust lead standard to 10 ug/ft² would protect at least 95 percent of children in the United States from having a concentration of lead in their blood above the current Centers for Disease Control level of concern. Similarly, the current window sill dust lead level of 250 micrograms per square foot is more than double NCHH’s recommended standard of 100.

“Achieving a standard of 10 ug/ft² on floors is practical and feasible and is considerably more health protective than the current standard. EPA and state and local regulatory agencies should swiftly revise their standards to reflect this new information,” said Morley.

NCHH is making the following recommendations:

- EPA should revise its standards to reflect the new studies
- Parents, contractors, and risk assessors should use the new standards in determining whether a home is safe
- Local jurisdictions should adopt the new standards

The use of lead paint in homes was banned in 1978. Lead remains a serious health risk today with an estimated 38 million homes containing lead-based paint. Lead contaminated household dust is the major source of lead exposure for children and high levels of dust can be generated when paint is disturbed (e.g. during renovation or repainting work) or if it becomes deteriorated. Lead causes learning disabilities and many other behavioral problems. It can also damage the kidneys, the nervous system and reproductive systems and cause high blood pressure. The impact of lead on children is especially serious because young children absorb lead more readily than adults. Approximately 250,000 children in the United States had elevated blood lead levels according to the most recent national survey (2003-2004).

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The National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) is the only national scientific and technical non-profit organization dedicated to creating healthy and safe homes for America's children through practical and proven steps. NCHH develops scientifically valid and practical strategies to make homes safe from hazards, to alert low-income families about housing-related health risks, and to help them protect their children. NCHH also works with governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop standards and programs and guide their implementation through insurers, lenders, federal and state laws and regulations, community organizations, and the courts.