



## Getting the lead out: New federal regulations change the rules of remodeling older homes

By Patti Brandt for the Daily News

New federal lead paint regulations that go into effect in April could add up to 10 percent to the cost of renovation projects in older homes and other buildings.

Under the new Environmental Protection Agency regulations, contractors that disturb lead-based paint in homes, child care facilities and schools built before 1978 — the year lead-based paint was outlawed — must be trained and certified to follow practices to prevent lead contamination.

The regulations, which take effect April 22, will affect painters, plumbers, carpenters and electricians, as workers in any of those trades can disturb old paint and create hazardous lead dust.

Dave Roberson, who owns the Midland-based Roberson Builders, is ready. His company specializes in older home renovation and he's taken the required class and gotten his company certified.

“The training is all about how to, first of all, know whether there is lead-based paint, and second, how to handle it during the remodeling process.”

But he also thinks the new regulations might be unnecessary. It's important to keep people safe, he said, but the government goes to extremes.

"We already do 80 percent of what they want us to do," Roberson said. "There's not a lot new to me."

New regulations include using plastic and duct tape to isolate the area of the home or building being renovated, taking steps to prevent lead dust from reaching other areas of the home, and doing a thorough clean-up afterward that includes using a HEPA vacuum to trap fine dust particles.

Roberson's company already does all of that, he said.

But new regulations also call for breaking up drywall covered with lead-based paint into small pieces and bagging it up, and covering up windows and even grass with plastic — to prevent lead from getting into soil — when working outside, Roberson said.

It's work that is time-consuming and will add to the labor costs of projects, he said.

Kelly Wall, owner of Greystone Homes and president of the Home Builders Association of Midland, said his company also has been certified.

"The training is all about how to, first of all, know whether there is lead-based paint, and second, how to handle it during the remodeling process," Wall said.

Only one person from a company needs to take the eight-hour class, at a cost of \$135, Wall said. The company then must register with the EPA at a cost of \$300.

"The whole idea behind all of this is to make sure kids are not exposed to lead dust or paint chips," Wall said. "We want to make sure that we don't harm any children."

Children are especially at risk for lead poisoning because their growing bodies absorb more lead and their nervous systems are still developing. Babies and young children can easily ingest lead dust as they tend to put their hands and other objects into their mouths.

Children with high levels of lead can have behavior and learning problems, slowed growth,

hearing problems and headaches, as well as damage to the brain and nervous system.

Wall has been building houses for about eight years and did home remodeling for about five years before that.

He said he is concerned that there is no plan for how the new regulations will be enforced. The EPA is managing the new lead paint policy, but by the end of the year Michigan will take responsibility for making sure local contractors are certified. And state workers are already stretched too thin, Wall said.

He said most — but not all — contractors will do a good job of enforcing and policing the policy themselves. But not all contractors will bother to get licensed, Wall said, so homeowners should ask to see their contractor's certification.

Roberson agreed, saying the federal government simply does not have enough manpower to police the new regulations. There are currently four inspectors to cover five states, he said.

A compliance guide for contractors and construction workers detailing the new regulations are available at [www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/sb-complianceguide.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/sb-complianceguide.pdf).

Homeowners who do their own remodeling should also be aware of the risk of creating lead dust, especially if they have children, Wall said. Information about the new regulations and guidelines for homeowners can be found at [www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead).

