

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Hazardous Substance Awareness - Lead

[Reference: Parts 1910, 1915, and 1926, subpart Z; 1926 subpart Z]

Lead is a toxic metal that may be encountered in some workplaces, particularly in older buildings, vessels, and equipment. Common sources include lead-based paint, industrial coatings, plumbing materials, batteries, solder, and certain metal alloys and industrial products. Even lead-bearing materials that appear solid can become hazardous once work begins that disturbs their surfaces.

Lead hazards often arise when painted or coated surfaces are sanded, scraped, burned, cut, or welded, or when lead-containing materials are otherwise disturbed. These activities can release lead dust or fumes into the air, which may not be immediately visible but can still pose a serious exposure risk. Tasks performed during renovation, maintenance, or demolition of older structures are especially likely to create lead hazards.

Exposure to lead can occur by breathing in airborne dust or fumes, or through hand-to-mouth contact when lead-contaminated surfaces, tools, or clothing are touched. Once absorbed into the body, lead can circulate through the bloodstream and accumulate over time. Lead can affect the nervous system, interfere with blood formation, and damage the kidneys. These health effects are typically associated with long-term exposure, rather than brief or incidental contact.

One important concern with lead is take-home exposure. Wearing lead-contaminated clothing, shoes, or personal protective equipment home can carry lead dust into vehicles and living spaces. Family members, especially children, are highly susceptible to lead exposure, even at very low levels. Avoid taking any work clothing and equipment home to prevent this type of secondary exposure.

Precautions to reduce lead exposure include identifying lead-containing materials before work begins and following established work practices when those materials are present. Engineering controls such as local exhaust ventilation and wet methods can help reduce airborne dust. Good housekeeping practices and proper hygiene, such as washing hands and face before eating, drinking, or smoking, are also critical. Air surveys and blood testing for lead is also required for workers with high exposures. When required, appropriate respiratory protection and protective clothing must be worn, and contaminated clothing must be managed according to established procedures.

If you are working with or around lead, or if you see a label or warning sign indicating its presence, remember that merely being near lead does not necessarily mean you are overexposed or at imminent risk. Following proper controls, procedures, and safety measures helps ensure exposure remains below OSHA's permissible limits.

If you have any questions or concerns about lead hazards or exposure, please direct them to your safety manager, supervisor, or other workplace representative. And please be sure to sign the training certification form to ensure you get credit for attending today's OSHA toolbox talk.

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Company Name: _____

Date: _____

Training led by: _____

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