

## Lurking in the walls

### Lead often found in paint, but solutions exist to remain safe

By Meg Hagerty

[mhagerty@poststar.com](mailto:mhagerty@poststar.com)

Monday, June 8, 2009 12:16 PM EDT

GLENS FALLS - Elisa Tousignant grew up in the Glens Falls area and knew which section of the city she wanted to set down roots with her husband and two young children, ages 3 and younger than 1.

"I was adamant about being in the Kensington school district," she said.

Tousignant and her husband were drawn to the white and blue two-story 1920s-era house, with its built-in cabinetry, wide front porch and fenced-in backyard.

The couple qualified for a HUD loan, which required lead testing at the home.

An inspection revealed lead dust in the kitchen and lead paint on the exterior, which the couple have since taken steps to mitigate out of concern for their young children.



Lead, considered to be a health hazard, was used in many products in and around the house, including paint, until 1978.

It is known to cause health problems such as cognitive disabilities, behavioral issues, seizures and death, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission also cites retarded fetal development and reproductive problems as repercussions of lead exposure.

Children younger than 6 years old are most at risk for lead poisoning, as they're more likely to eat paint flakes or play on the floor and pick up lead dust.

The Tousignants said their son was tested twice during pediatric checkups and does not have lead poisoning; their daughter has not yet been checked.

"She's the one we worry about because she's crawling around sticking stuff in her mouth right now," Tousignant said.

A home inspector checked for flaking and chipped paint, and tested floors and walls for lead dust. Because contaminated dust was found in the kitchen, a special machine mopped and vacuumed "every square inch" of the house, Tousignant said. They also repainted the children's rooms before taking occupancy in January.

A test was conducted again to make sure everything was lead-free.

Having investigated seven older houses before they one they bought, Tousignant was well aware of lead paint.

"Some needed not just a touch-up but a lot of paint work. You can tell by the colors how old (the houses) are, and you can just assume (they have) lead paint," she said.

Work still needs to be done on the exterior of the house. The first floor is clad with aluminum while the second floor is sheathed in blue lead-painted cedar shakes.

Tousignant is waiting for a contractor to begin encapsulating the cedar shakes with vinyl and covering the trim work around the windows with a metal coil stock. Mulch will be placed 3 feet from the perimeter of the house after the enclosure to prevent any contaminated soil.

They expect to spend about \$7,000 on the repairs.

Stephen Connell, of Sherlock Home Inspection in Glens Falls, said homeowners can deal with lead paint, but

maintenance is important.

"Most of the problem comes from just lack of care. You have peeling paint or windows that are old that when you open and close them, the two abutting pieces of wood that are painted will scrape off a lead dust that gets in the air," he said.

Connell advises against dry-sand peeling paint because dust will settle on the floor and furniture. In addition to wet-sanding, owners should mop floors, walls and windows, especially in play areas, he said.

The Tousignants know that if they see flaking paint in areas that haven't been repainted, they can don dust masks and wet-sand the surface just enough to create tooth for new acrylic or latex paint to adhere.

Given the solutions available, Tousignant said she wasn't deterred by older homes.

"They just have so much more charm than newer homes. If you do have a windowsill that's flaking, it doesn't take but five minutes to (wet-)sand it and throw on a coat of paint, or if it's flaking, you vacuum and keep up with those things. It's in most older homes and it shouldn't keep you from buying a house that you love," she said.

But just painting over the hazard with regular paint is not enough to eliminate the risk, according to the Consumer Protection Safety Commission.

The commission warns that lead-based paint, even when covered with non-lead paint, may continue to loosen from the surface below and create lead dust.

The new paint may also partially mix with the lead-based paint, and lead dust will be released when the new paint begins to deteriorate.

Certified lead "abatement" contractors can help homeowners permanently remove lead hazards by removing, sealing, or enclosing lead-based paint with special materials.

Contact the National Lead Information Center by calling (800) 424-LEAD for help locating certified contractors and to see if financial assistance is available.

### **Protecting your family**

If you suspect that your house has lead hazards, you can take some immediate steps to reduce your family's risk:

- If you rent, notify your landlord of peeling or chipping paint.
- Clean up paint chips immediately.
- Clean floors, window frames, window sills and other surfaces weekly. Use a mop, sponge or paper towel with warm water and a general all-purpose cleaner or one made specifically for lead.
- Thoroughly rinse sponges and mop heads after cleaning dirty or dusty areas.
- Wash children's hands often, especially before they eat and before nap and bed times.
- Keep play areas clean. Wash bottles, pacifiers, toys and stuffed animals regularly.
- Keep children from chewing window sills or other painted surfaces.
- Clean or remove shoes before entering your home to avoid tracking in lead from soil.
- Make sure children eat healthy and nutritious meals, as children with good diets absorb less lead.

Source: [www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadinfo.htm#protect](http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadinfo.htm#protect) and [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov)

#### **XRF Rental - Fast Shipping, Great Rates**

For RoHS compliance, metals in soil, lead paint testing, alloys.

[www.xfrentals.com](http://www.xfrentals.com)

#### **Discount Tire**

Over 700 locations nationwide.

[www.DiscountTire.com](http://www.DiscountTire.com)