



How to Hire a Lead-Safe Contractor

Lead-safe painting, repairs and construction require a special set of skills that contractors working on a pre-1978 home should now have, but not all do. Most projects that disturb paint in pre-1978 homes require an EPA Renovation, Repair and Painting (RRP) Lead-Safe Certified Renovator who follows Federal and State of California regulations. For information about lead laws and regulations go to www.achhd.org/leadpoisoning/regs.htm

There are steps you can take to improve the chances of hiring someone who has the knowledge and experience to handle your job. Choosing an RRP lead-safe certified firm is one important step but certification alone does not guarantee that the work will be lead-safe. Please see the information below before hiring a contractor.

The Importance of Lead Safety

Warning: Painting and renovation projects can create lead dust which can be a significant source of lead exposure! Most structures built before 1978 contain lead-based paint under the surface layers. Dust from uncontained sanding, scraping, water blasting or flame torching of lead-based paint can be very hazardous to residents and workers and can contaminate your property. Uncontained paint removal is also now a violation under Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations. Contractors should minimize, contain, and clean-up all paint chips and dust no matter the size of the project. For projects disturbing six square feet or more in any interior room or 20 square feet or more on the exterior or any window replacement or demolition, the RRP Certified Renovator must follow the lead safety requirements, and complete and document a Cleaning Verification process.

It is important for property owners to learn the basics of lead safety practices. Information is available on the following websites:

- ACLPPP website: Reducing Lead Hazards From Paint and Soil
Go to: www.achhd.org/leadpoisoning/hazard.htm
- EPA website: Renovation, Repair and Painting Program
Go to: www.epa.gov/lead

For more information, you may consider taking the EPA Renovation, Repair and Painting Course. Information on training providers can be found at: <https://www.achhd.org/classes/leadtrain.htm>

How to Screen Contractors

Unfortunately, having a lead-safe certification doesn't guarantee that the contractor will work lead-safe on your job. You will need to screen contractors carefully and monitor the work. We recommend taking these steps:

- 1) **Only use contractors that are EPA RRP lead-safe certified.** When you meet the contractor, ask to see the site supervisor's certification card.



Look for this seal:

- 2) **Check on the company's website** to see if they pro-actively make a point of saying that they work lead-safe. Some contractors understand the importance of working lead-safe and others see the regulations only as a burden to be worked around.
- 3) **Meet with the contractor** when they come to look at the job. Pay attention if they give you short, incomplete answers about lead safety. See if they can clearly explain how they will contain all the dust and debris and

maintain a clean and lead-safe work site and protect your family, property and neighbors from lead exposure. Don't be satisfied with vague assurances of high quality work.

Ask these questions:

- a. **How will you prepare the painted surfaces?** See how they answer. Do they bring up the need for lead-safe work and containment without being prompted? Do they mention wet scraping or using a sander attached to a HEPA vacuum? If the work is exterior will they wet scrape, and cover exposed wood with primer, *before* they wash the building? This is important in order to control the spread of paint chips.
- b. **How will you keep paint chips off the ground or floor?** Their answer should include the use of heavy plastic sheeting that is taped down and covers plants or furniture.
- c. **Do you have a HEPA vacuum cleaner?** This is a tell-tale sign. A regular wet/dry shop vacuum is not the same as a HEPA vacuum. An experienced lead-safe contractor will have a HEPA vacuum cleaner.
- d. **How will you protect the workers from lead dust?** Workers should wear respirators with an N100 or P100 magenta colored filter when disturbing any pre-1978 painted surface. There are some disposable N100 respirators but simple paper masks are not enough. They should wear tyvek suits including booties and a hood, or clothes that they can change out of before returning home. They should also have a place outside the work area where they can wash their hands and face.
- e. **How will you clean up?** The contractor should answer that they will clean the work site every day, vacuum up paint chips with a HEPA vacuum and wet mop thoroughly.
- f. **Do you conduct a cleaning verification?** The contractor should be familiar with the cleaning verification process which gives an indication of whether any dust is remaining. They should also provide you with a record of the cleaning verification at the end of the job.

4) Experience

Check that the firm has experience doing the kind of work you need done. Ask for a list of former clients and call them. Find out if their projects were similar to the one you are planning. Ask questions like: "Did they contain all the dust and debris from the work? Did they leave a clean worksite? Was the quality of the work acceptable?"

It is also very useful to ask for the address of any current jobs in progress, especially for exterior work. Since an important part of a lead-safe project is *how* it is done (rather than simply how it looks afterwards) you can learn a lot about a contractor's practices by driving by a job in progress to see if they are following lead-safe work practices and containing the paint chips.

5) Licensure

All building contractors who work on your property are required to be licensed by the Contractors State License Board unless the value of the total project is less than \$500. Check with your local permit office for current requirements. Verify their license by asking to see their pocket license and another form of identification. You can find out if the license is in good standing at www.cslb.ca.gov and performing a check by the contractor's name, business name, or license number. If you know the license number, you can also call the license board at (800) 321-2752.

6) EPA Renovation, Repair and Painting (RRP) Certification

For projects disturbing six square feet or more in any interior room, or 20 square feet or more on the exterior, or any window replacement or demolition, the contractor must have an EPA RRP Certified Renovator who is responsible for the project, trains the other workers and completes the required cleaning verification at the end of the job. The contractor must also be registered as an EPA RRP Certified Firm.



Look for this seal:

7) California Department of Public Health-Lead Related Construction Certifications

Some contractors will have taken additional training to meet State of California requirements for Lead-Related Construction. Required for permanent abatement, this certification supplements but does not

replace the EPA RRP certification. For more information on State Certification, a list of certified individuals and to check for current status of individuals' certifications, you can call the California Department of Public Health at (800) 597-5323 or visit their website at

https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDC/DEOD/CLPPB/Pages/LRChire_lead_prof.aspx

8) Insurance

Ask the contractor if the company is insured against claims covering workers' compensation, property damage, personal liability and lead liability in case of accidents or lead exposures. Request a copy of the certificate of insurance. You may wish to contact the insurance agent or company to ensure that the insurance is still in force and to confirm coverage amounts.

In California, if a contractor has employees, workers' compensation insurance coverage is required by law. Check their certificate of insurance to make sure they are covered.

Many contractors general liability insurance policies do not include lead hazard or pollution liability. This coverage is not required by regulation but if a contractor does not carry this insurance any losses related to lead hazards created by the work may not be covered by insurance. Decide whether you want this coverage and take this risk into account when comparing contractor's bids.

Sign a Contract

Once you have selected a contractor, insist on a written contract that spells out in detail what will be done, the work schedule, the price and the terms of payment. Make sure that everything you want done is included and that both parties understand and agree on the scope of work. It is common to provide a 10% payment or \$1,000, whichever is less, in advance of the work. The remaining payments should be made for work that has been completed. It is customary to retain up to 10% of the project cost until the job is complete, the cleaning verification has been done, and you are satisfied with the work. Keep a job file of all papers relating to your project, including all payments.

Monitor the Work - Speak up if you see things that look wrong.

Pay attention to what is going on while the work is in progress. During demolition or paint disturbing work, all dust and debris must be contained with plastic sheeting, the contractor must take steps to minimize dust created by the work through wet methods or HEPA vacuum connected tools, debris must be bagged and removed from the jobsite, and workers must be wearing protective equipment and not tracking dust or debris outside the contained area. The worksite should be left clean and free of any debris or dust. The Lead Certified Renovator must monitor the workers and subcontractors to ensure that safety requirements are met although they are not required to be on site at all times.

If work has been done in an unsafe manner in your home, ask the contractor to do a thorough clean-up. You may want to consider clearance dust testing of areas impacted by the work by an independent consultant. Visit our webpage on testing for lead at www.achhd.org/leadpoisoning/testing.htm for more information.

Finally, if you have any reason to suspect that you or your family, especially children under 6 years old, may have been exposed to lead dust, ask your health care provider for a blood lead test.

For Contractors

If you are interested in contracting opportunities on Alameda County Healthy Homes-funded projects, please see contractor information at:

Minor Home Repair: <https://www.achhd.org/programs/housing-rehab/bids.htm>

Lead Hazard Control: <https://www.achhd.org/contractors/new.htm>

Alameda County also has a program for Small, Local and Emerging Businesses. Find out more at: <http://www.acgov.org/auditor/sleb/overview.htm>