Testing Your Home For Lead
In Paint, Dust, And Soil
About This Publication

This publication is for anyone who is considering having a home or residence tested for lead in paint, dust, or soil by a lead-based paint professional. It explains the technical aspects of lead testing without overwhelming the reader. Thus, commonly asked questions are presented in logical order. The first section tells why you would test for lead, the approaches for testing for lead, and what information you will get from each approach. The second section answers specific questions about how paint, soil, and dust sampling are conducted by a lead-based paint professional in your home. Finally, the last section answers other questions about testing, including questions about home test kits and testing of water and ceramics.

Important:

This publication addresses federal regulations and guidelines. Your state may have its own lead program and different regulations. For more information, contact the National Lead Information Center (NLIC) at 1-800-424-LEAD or visit http://www.epa.gov/lead.
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Section 1
General Questions About Testing Procedures

Q: Why Should I Test My Home For Lead?

A: There are numerous reasons why you might want to test your home for lead, especially if built before 1978.

I. There Are (Or Will Be) Children Age Six And Younger In The Home

Lead from paint, especially peeling or flaking paint, can get into dust and soil in and around a home. Young children may then swallow the lead during normal hand-to-mouth activity. In addition, an unborn child may be exposed to lead in the mother's womb. High levels of lead in the fetus and in children age six and younger have been linked to nervous system damage, behavior and learning problems, and slow growth. Testing can tell you whether there is lead-based paint or a lead-based paint hazard in your home.

II. You Are About To Remodel, Renovate, Or Repaint Your Home

Any disturbance of lead-based paint can create a hazard by depositing lead chips or particles in the house dust or in the soil around the house. If you are planning on doing renovation, remodeling, or repainting, you should have testing done by a certified lead-based paint professional on any painted surfaces that will be removed, disturbed, scraped, or sanded before starting the work. The EPA brochure Reducing Lead Hazards When Remodeling Your Home (see page 16) provides guidelines for renovating or remodeling your home.

If your house was built before 1978 and you hire a professional to renovate, the renovator must, before beginning renovation, give you a copy of the EPA pamphlet Protect Your Family From Lead In Your Home.

III. You Are Renting Or Buying A Home

The Federal Lead-Based Paint and Lead-Based Paint Hazards Disclosure Rule requires that the landlord or seller of a residential dwelling built prior to 1978 provide the renter or buyer with:

- The pamphlet Protect Your Family From Lead In Your Home and
- Any available information on lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards in the home.

A buyer must be given the opportunity to conduct testing to determine whether lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards are present. While you are not required by law to test for lead, it may be advisable if you have (or plan to have) young children in the home.
IV. You Are A Landlord Or Selling A Home

As discussed above, a homeowner is required to provide renters or buyers with any available information on lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards in homes built before 1978. Testing will give you the information that may be requested by potential renters or buyers.

Q: Why Is Testing Recommended For Houses Built Before 1978?

A: Federal regulations placed a limit on the amount of lead in paint sold for residential use starting in 1978. That is why homes built before 1978 are subject to the Disclosure Rule. The older the home, the greater the chance of lead-based paint and lead-based paint hazards, and the more important it is to have the home tested.

Q: What Kind Of Testing Do I Want?

A: Three different approaches for testing lead are available: a lead-based paint inspection, a risk assessment, and a lead hazard screen. A combination inspection and risk assessment may also be done. Selection of the approach depends on why you are testing.

I. Lead-Based Paint Inspection

A lead-based paint inspection is a surface-by-surface investigation to determine whether there is lead-based paint in the home and where it is located. An inspection may be particularly useful before renovation, repainting, or paint removal.

An inspection includes:

- An inventory of all painted surfaces, including the outside as well as the inside of the home. ‘Painted surfaces’ include all surfaces coated with paint, shellac, varnish, stain, coating, or even paint covered by wallpaper.

- Selection and testing of each type of painted surface.

Then you should get a report listing the painted surfaces in the home and whether each painted surface contains lead-based paint.

An inspection does not typically test painted furniture unless it is a permanent part of the home, such as kitchen or bathroom cabinets or built-in bookshelves. Soil, dust, and water are not typically tested during an inspection.

The presence of lead-based paint in a home does not necessarily mean there is a lead-based paint hazard to occupants. To make sure, you may want a different testing approach (either a risk assessment or hazard screen).
II. Risk Assessment

A risk assessment is an on-site investigation to determine the presence, type, severity, and location of lead-based paint hazards. The presence of deteriorated lead-based paint or high levels of lead in dust or soil pose potential hazards to children who may ingest lead inside or playing outside.

A risk assessment includes:

- A visual inspection of the residence to determine the location of deteriorated paint, the extent and causes of the deterioration, and other factors that may cause lead exposure to young children inside or outside the home.

- Testing deteriorated paint and paint on surfaces where there is reason to believe (from teeth marks or from reports of a parent) that a child has chewed, licked, or mouthed the paint. Painted surfaces in good condition are not tested.

- Testing household dust from floors and windows. Samples should include areas from a child’s bedroom, a child’s main play area, the main entrance, and other locations to be chosen by the certified Risk Assessor.

- Testing bare soil from play areas, the building foundation, and possibly other areas around the home.

- Optional water testing.

Finally, you should get a report identifying the location of the types of lead-based paint hazards and ways to control them. Because not all paint is tested, a risk assessment cannot conclude that there is no lead-based paint in the home.

### Typical Painted Surfaces Tested During Inspection

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<tr>
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<th>Outside The Home</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Door Trim</td>
<td>Porches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fascia, Soffits</td>
<td>Roofing</td>
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<td>Fences</td>
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<td>Gutters, Downspouts</td>
<td>Stairs</td>
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<td>Handrails</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lattice Work</td>
<td>Swing Sets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inside The Home | Outside The Home

- Testing bare soil from play areas, the building foundation, and possibly other areas around the home.

- Optional water testing.

Finally, you should get a report identifying the location of the types of lead-based paint hazards and ways to control them. Because not all paint is tested, a risk assessment cannot conclude that there is no lead-based paint in the home.
An important point is that a risk assessment identifies current lead-based paint hazards. New hazards may arise if lead-based paint is disturbed, damaged, or deteriorates.

If you want to know which painted surfaces contain lead-based paint and whether any lead-based hazards are present, you will need a combination inspection and risk assessment.

III. Lead Hazard Screen

A lead hazard screen is a limited version of a risk assessment for houses with a low chance of lead risks.

In a lead hazard screen:

- Any painted surfaces in a deteriorated condition are tested.
- Two sets of dust samples are collected in a lead hazard screen. One set represents the floors and the other set represents the windows. Typically, there is less dust sampling in a lead hazard screen than in a risk assessment.
- Usually soil samples are not collected in a lead hazard screen, with one exception. If there is evidence of paint chips in the soil from previous exterior repainting, then the soil should be sampled and tested.

The outcome of the lead hazard screen is either a conclusion that lead-based paint hazards are probably not present or a recommendation that a full risk assessment be conducted to determine if such hazards are present.

In a lead hazard screen, only deteriorated paint is tested. Thus, a lead hazard screen cannot conclude there is no lead-based paint in the home.

A lead hazard screen is only recommended for residences that are generally in good condition, with little visible dust, and with paint in good condition (very little chipping or flaking).

If not, the screen is likely to be a waste of time and money. In general, a lead hazard screen will be more useful in housing built after 1960.

As with a risk assessment, a lead hazard screen identifies current lead-based paint hazards. If there is lead-based paint in the home, new hazards may arise if that paint is disturbed, damaged, or deteriorates.

Who Can Do Lead Testing For Me?

It is strongly recommended that testing be performed by a certified Inspector or certified Risk Assessor.

- Certified Inspectors can perform only lead-based paint inspections.
- Certified Risk Assessors can perform both risk assessments and lead hazard screens.

Your state may define the titles for lead-based paint professionals and the types of testing they can perform differently from what this brochure says. You can find out by calling NLIC at 1-800-424-LEAD.
What Will The Testing Report Tell Me?

That will depend on which approach has been used: inspection, risk assessment, or lead hazard screen. Request a sample report before the testing is done so that you may see what information will be provided and how it will be presented. You should also request that actual lead values (not just ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ classifications) be provided in the report as evidence that the testing was actually done.

I. Inspection Report

If you have an inspection done, you should receive a report that tells you which painted surfaces were tested and the test results for each surface. An inspection report will not tell you the condition of the lead-based paint or whether lead-based paint hazards exist.

II. Risk Assessment Report

If you have a risk assessment done, you will receive a report that tells you whether there are any lead-based paint hazards and recommends ways to reduce or control any hazards present.

The certified Risk Assessor will take into account the test results and the results of the visual inspection to decide if there are any lead-based paint hazards and how to control them. Lead-based paint hazards identified include lead-based paint in deteriorated condition or on surfaces mouthed by a child. In addition, house dust or bare soil with hazardous lead levels will be identified.

The certified Risk Assessor will provide a list of options for controlling each hazard. Options may include both interim controls and abatement.

III. Hazard Screen Report

If you have a lead hazard screen done, the report tells you either that there are probably no lead-based paint hazards in the house or that full-scale risk assessment is needed.

Do I Have To Do Anything After The Testing Is Completed?

There is no EPA requirement for you to do anything to any lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards found when testing your home. However, if your home was built before 1978, you will be required to provide the test results to any renter or buyer when you lease or sell the home. For more information on the responsibilities of sellers, landlords and their agents, contact NLIC at 1-800-424-LEAD or visit http://www.epa.gov/lead.

Be aware that there may be state or other requirements for action based on the test results. You can call NLIC at 1-800-424-LEAD for information about what is required in your locality before you start testing.
**Q:** May I Abate Lead-Based Paint Hazards In My Own Home?

**A:** If you decide to abate lead-based paint hazards in your own home, it is not recommended that you do the work yourself. Abatement activities must be done following careful procedures to prevent contamination of the home with lead dust. To be safe, hire a certified lead-based paint contractor (a certified professional who can do lead-based paint related abatement). Dust samples should be collected to check the thoroughness of the work.

Be aware that you must be certified yourself or you must hire a certified lead-based paint professional in the following cases: 1) if a child with a blood-lead level of 20 µg/dL* or higher for a single venous test (or 15–19 µg/dL in two consecutive tests taken 3 to 4 months apart) lives in the house or 2) you own the house and rent it to someone else.

If you hire a firm to do testing for lead-based paint hazards, note that you are not under any obligation to hire the same firm to do the abatement. In fact, it would be better to have one firm conduct all testing and another firm conduct the abatement work. That will prevent a conflict of interest.

Be sure to maintain a record of the work to help during any future sale or rental of the home.

* Pronounced micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood.
Are All Painted Surfaces In The Home Tested?

Not every single painted surface in the home will be tested in an inspection, but all types of painted surfaces are tested. For example, a room may have three windows, all painted the same color and all made out of wood. The certified Inspector may not test all three windows, because they appear to be the same.

In a similar fashion, the certified Inspector will go through every room and test the different types of painted surfaces in the rooms. Painted surfaces on the outside of the home, detached structures (such as garages), and items like painted fences and swing sets should also be tested.

Inspections differ from risk assessments and lead hazard screens. In a risk assessment, only deteriorated paint and paint that has been mouthed or chewed by a child will be tested. In a lead hazard screen, only deteriorated paint is tested.

How Are Painted Surfaces Tested?

There are currently two methods recognized by EPA for testing paint: portable X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) analyzers and paint chip sampling followed by analysis by a laboratory recognized by EPA’s National Lead Laboratory Accreditation Program (NLLAP).

I. Portable X-Ray Fluorescence Analyzers (XRFs)

A portable XRF measures lead in paint, generally without damaging the paint. However, readings from some XRFs are affected by the base material (known as the “substrate”) underneath the paint, such as wood, plaster, or metal. For these cases, the certified Inspector removes paint from a few surfaces of each type and takes a measurement on the unpainted surface. These measurements provide a baseline to adjust the lead in paint value. This procedure may do some paint damage. Also, for curved surfaces or very deteriorated paint, XRF analyzers may not read accurately and a paint chip sample may be required.

When a certified lead-based paint professional follows good testing practices,
XRF analyzers provide a fast and reliable method for classifying many painted surfaces. However, some XRF test results may be inconclusive (neither positive nor negative). Then laboratory testing of a paint chip sample may be necessary.

Because the XRF analyzer uses a radiation source to detect lead, occupants in the household should be asked to stay out of rooms behind the surfaces being tested.

II. Paint Chip Sampling And Laboratory Analysis

Paint chip samples are collected for laboratory analysis by removing one to four square inches of paint from the surface. All layers of paint in the sampled area are included in the sample. Usually samples will contain some of the material beneath the paint, such as wood, plaster, or concrete particles. The amount of this material will be kept to a minimum.

Tools such as chisels and scrapers are used to remove the paint. Sometimes a heat gun is used to soften the paint and make the removal easier. If so, a respirator should be worn by the person operating the heat gun for protection from lead and other fumes. In addition, the room or area should be well ventilated to protect occupants.

After collecting the paint chip sample, the certified lead-based paint professional will repair the scraped area so that adjacent paint will not peel or flake off. Any paint chips or dust from the sampling should be cleaned up by the certified lead-based paint professional to ensure no lead dust is left behind.

Paint chip samples should be analyzed for lead by a laboratory recognized by EPA’s NLLAP as proficient for testing lead in paint. EPA has established the NLLAP to ensure that laboratory analyses are done accurately. A laboratory on the list is recognized as proficient for testing for lead in whichever of the three sample types (paint, dust, or soil) the laboratory has qualified. The certified Inspector and certified Risk Assessor must ensure that any paint chip samples from your home are analyzed by a laboratory on the NLLAP list for paint. This publication addresses federal regulations and guidelines. Your state may have its own lead program and different regulations. For more information, contact NLIC at 1-800-424-LEAD or visit http://www.epa.gov/lead.

While paint chip sampling followed by laboratory analysis is generally more accurate than XRF testing, sampling and analysis take longer to complete and paint chips must be scraped from many surfaces in the home. In some cases, a surface may be curved or so deteriorated that an XRF cannot be used properly and sampling may be the only way to test the paint.

What Do The Results Of Paint Testing Mean?

A certified lead-based paint professional will use guidance specific for each type of XRF analyzer to determine whether a measurement indicates that:

- Lead-based paint is present,
- Lead-based paint is not present, or
- The measurement is inconclusive and a laboratory test is necessary.

The guidance ensures the XRF measurement classifies paint as lead-based when there is 1.0 milligram of lead per square centimeter of painted surface or greater (1.0 mg/cm²). An XRF analyzer typically reads in mg/cm², meaning milligrams per square centimeter.

When the paint chip sampling followed by laboratory analysis method is used, the federal definition of lead-based paint is dependent on how the results are reported.

- If the laboratory report is expressed as weight of lead per weight of paint chip, the federal definition of lead-based paint is 0.5 percent lead (0.5%). This is mathematically the same as 5,000 milligrams of lead per kilogram of
paint chip (5,000 mg/kg), or 5,000 micrograms of lead per gram of paint chip (5,000 µg/g), or 5,000 parts per million lead (5,000 ppm).

- If the laboratory report is expressed as a weight of lead per unit area of painted surface, the federal definition of lead-based paint is 1.0 mg/cm² (the same as for XRF analysis).

It is possible to report laboratory results in both types of units, but this is rarely done because of the additional time and work required.

Unfortunately, there is no universal definition of lead-based paint. Some state and local governments have definitions of lead-based paint which differ from those in federal law. It is recommended that when there is a conflict between the federal definition and a state or local definition, the more stringent standard (that is, the lower number) be used to define lead-based paint. A certified lead-based paint professional (certified Inspector or certified Risk Assessor) will be aware of and will follow the appropriate standard.

### Federal Definition Of Lead-Based Paint Depends On How Test Results Are Reported

<table>
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<th>How Test Results Are Reported</th>
<th>Federal Definition Of Lead-Based Paint</th>
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<tr>
<td>If results are reported as percent (or equivalent)</td>
<td>Then, in order for it to be considered lead-based paint, the paint must have greater than or equal to 0.5% (which is the same as 5,000 µg/g or 5,000 mg/kg or 5,000 ppm) lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If results are reported as milligrams per square centimeter</td>
<td>Then, in order for it to be considered lead-based paint, the paint must have greater than or equal to 1 mg/cm² lead</td>
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**Q:** What If No Lead-Based Paint Is Found In My Home?

**A:** Lead can still be present in paint which is not classified as “lead-based.” This would occur when the paint has a lower amount of lead than the federal government regulates. If lead is present in the paint, lead dust can be released when the paint deteriorates, or is disturbed during remodeling, renovation,
sanding, or some maintenance work that breaks the surface of the paint. This is especially important in homes built before 1978. Since the amount of lead in paint was limited by federal regulation in 1978, lead exposure during remodeling and renovation is not as much a concern in newer homes. So you should be careful when there is work that involves extensive breaking of painted surfaces in a home built before 1978. Make sure any dust and debris created by breaking painted surfaces are thoroughly cleaned up, painted surfaces are repaired and left intact when the work is done, and children stay away from the work areas until all repairs and clean-up are completed.

The EPA brochure Reducing Lead Hazards When Remodeling Your Home provides guidelines for renovating and remodeling your home. See page 16 for more information on how to order the brochure.

Q: How Are Dust Samples Collected And Analyzed?

A: The most common method for dust collection is a surface wipe sample. Most certified Risk Assessors will use baby wipes or wet wipes to collect dust.

If dust is collected from a floor, an area of one square foot is usually sampled. The area is wiped several times in different directions to pick up all the dust. After sampling, the wipe is placed in a container and sent to a laboratory for analysis. The certified Risk Assessor will also collect wipe samples from windows and measure the surface area wiped.

In some situations, special types of vacuum samplers may be used for dust collection. These are different from home vacuum cleaners, although some may look the same.

The certified lead-based paint professional must send dust samples to a laboratory recognized by EPA’s NLLAP that is proficient for dust analysis. This publication addresses federal regulations and guidelines. Your state may have its own lead program and different regulations. For more information, contact NLIC at 1-800-424-LEAD or visit http://www.epa.gov/lead.

Q: What Do The Results Of Dust Sampling Mean?

A: Dust sample results are usually expressed as a weight of lead per unit area of surface. The units will usually be micrograms of lead per square foot. For example, a floor wipe sample may be expressed as 50 micrograms of lead per square foot. This is written as 50 µg/ft². The certified lead-based paint professional will provide guidance in interpreting the results of the dust testing.
How Are Soil Samples Collected And Analyzed?

Soil samples are collected from bare soil areas (soil with no grass or other covering) near your home where children play and from bare soil areas near the house foundation or dripline. Optional sampling areas are gardens, pathways, and pet sleeping areas. Samples are collected by coring or scooping methods that take the top half-inch of soil. Samples of non-bare soil may sometimes be collected.

Soil samples must be sent to a laboratory recognized by EPA's NLLAP that is proficient in soil analysis. This publication addresses federal regulations and guidelines. Your state may have its own lead program and different regulations. For more information, contact NLIC at 1-800-424-LEAD or visit http://www.epa.gov/lead.

What Do The Results Of Soil Testing Mean?

Results of soil samples are expressed as a weight of lead per unit weight of soil, usually in parts per million. For example, a soil sample result may be 300 parts per million. This is written 300 ppm. The certified lead-based paint professional will help you interpret the results of the soil testing.

What Are Composite Samples?

Composite samples are combinations of individual samples analyzed together in a laboratory to obtain a single average result. Both dust and soil samples may be composited. For example, a floor dust sample may be collected in each of three rooms and combined to obtain one composite dust sample to be analyzed by the laboratory. Or four soil samples taken in a play area may be combined to obtain one composite soil sample. Paint samples may also be composited, but this is not as common as compositing dust and soil samples.

Composite samples may often be used in risk assessments and lead hazard screens to reduce the cost of laboratory analysis or to increase the representativeness of a single sample. The disadvantage of composite samples is that information is not available for each room (or location) from which samples were collected.

The certified Risk Assessor will interpret composite sample results, if any. The advantage of composite samples is that information is obtained at reduced cost or more samples are collected for the same cost.
Section 3
Miscellaneous Questions
Frequently Asked About Testing

Q: What Are Home Test Kits?
A: Home test kits are used in the home to detect lead in paint, soil, and dust (and, in some cases, water, dishware, glasses, and ceramics). A reaction occurs causing a color change when chemicals in the kit are exposed to lead.

Q: Does EPA Recommend Test Kits For Paint, Dust, Or Soil Testing?
A: No. EPA does not currently recommend home test kits to detect lead in paint, dust, or soil. Studies show that these kits are not reliable enough to tell the difference between high and low levels of lead. At this time, the kits are not recommended for testing performed by either homeowners or certified lead-based paint professionals.

Q: May I Collect Paint, Dust, And Soil Samples Myself And Send Them To A Laboratory?
A: You may do this, although your samples may not be of the same quality as those collected by a certified lead-based paint professional. If you want to collect samples yourself, it is recommended that you send paint, dust, or soil samples to a laboratory recognized by EPA’s NLLAP. A list of NLLAP laboratories is available from NLIC by calling 1-800-424-LEAD. If the samples contain high levels of lead, you should have a certified lead-based paint professional do a risk assessment of your home.

Q: What About Testing For Lead In Water?
A: Lead pipes and lead solder were once used in plumbing and lead leaked into drinking water. Water testing is not routinely conducted by certified lead-based paint testing professionals, but you may ask for it as an optional service. If you
would like information about testing for lead in water, call the EPA Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

**Q:** What About Testing For Lead In Furniture, Dishware, And Mini-Blinds?

**A:** Lead may be present in the paint on furniture. If the furniture is old or the paint is damaged, you may want to have it tested. A certified Inspector or certified Risk Assessor may do this testing for you.

Lead may also be present in some glassware (for example, lead crystal) and in glazes found on ceramic ware. The lead may be absorbed into the drink and food stored in these items.

Contact NLIC at 1-800-424-LEAD or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Food Information Line at 1-800-FDA-4010 for information on testing glassware and ceramics or access the FDA webpage at [http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lead.html#advice](http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lead.html#advice).

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has issued a warning that some mini-blinds may contain lead. For further information, contact the CPSC hotline at 1-800-638-2772 or access the CPSC webpage at [http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpul/ prerel/ prhtml96/96150.html](http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpul/prerel/prhtml96/96150.html).
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<td>Testing ceramic ware and related items</td>
<td>Food and Drug Administration (FDA)</td>
<td>1-800-FDA-4010 <a href="http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lead.html#advice">http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lead.html#advice</a></td>
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<td>State lead programs and regulations,</td>
<td>National Lead Information Center (NLIC)</td>
<td>1-800-424-LEAD OR 1-800-877-8339 <a href="http://www.epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm">http://www.epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm</a></td>
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<td>Information on testing drinking water for lead</td>
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<td>1-312-886-7836</td>
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<td>1-214-665-7577</td>
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<td>1-303-312-6021</td>
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<td>Region 9 AS, AZ, CA, GU, HI, NV, NP</td>
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<td>1-415-744-1069</td>
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<td>Region 10 AK, ID, OR, WA</td>
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<td>1-206-553-1985</td>
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Additional Reading:

These brochures and fact sheets can be obtained by calling NLIC at 1-800-424-LEAD or visiting http://www.epa.gov/lead.

*Buying A Home? Here’s What You Need To Know About Lead-Based Paint*, EPA brochure, EPA publication number EPA 747-F-99-001 (January 2000).


*The Lead-Based Paint Pre-Renovation Education Rule*, EPA handbook, EPA publication number EPA 747-B-99-004 (September 1999).

*Disclosure of Lead-Based Paint Hazards in Housing*, EPA/HUD fact sheet, EPA publication number EPA 747-F-96-002 (March 1996).