Who Are We?
How Can You Contribute?

The Community Environmental Resource Program (CERP) was launched this past September to provide needed environmental information to the people of St. Louis and East St. Louis. CERP is funded through the Environmental Protection Agency's EMPACT program - a national initiative aimed at providing communities across America with better access to information about the environment.

The program's goal is to empower citizens with information about potential environmental hazards. We want to become the community's leading source for environmental information!

CERP cannot do this without the help of the community. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact us. **Is there an area of concern that you would like us to address?? Just let us know!**

Where Can I Get More Information About Lead Poisoning?

City of St. Louis
Health Department (314) 612-5460
Lead Prevention Coalition (314) 214-8006

City of East St. Louis
East Side Health District (618) 271-8722
St Clair County Health Dept. (618) 233-7769
East St. Louis Lead Collaborative Partnership (618) 482-7074

Missouri Dept. of Health 1-800-575-9267
St. Mary's Hospital (618)274-1900
U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
1-800-424-LEAD

Phone: (314) 421-4220 ext. 236 / (618) 274-2750 ext. 236 Fax: (314) 231-6120 Email: cerp@ewgateway.org

Serving the St. Louis and East St. Louis Communities

Community Environmental Resource Program
C/o East-West Gateway Coordinating Council
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St. Louis, MO 63102

Non-Profit org.
U.S. Postage
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St. Louis, MO
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We're on the Web
http://stlouis.missouri.org/cerp/

Phone: (314) 421-4220 ext. 236 / (618) 274-2750 ext. 236 Fax: (314) 231-6120 Email: cerp@ewgateway.org

Community Environmental Resource Program

Serving the St. Louis and East St. Louis Communities

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Testing for Lead Contamination in Our Schools What's Going On?

St. Louis Public Schools officials announced earlier this year that they were taking special precautions to make sure that students' health was not at risk because of possible exposure to lead contamination in some schools. After a four-year old pre-school student at Dunbar Elementary School was found to be suffering from lead poisoning, a total of 35 pre-school, kindergarten, and first-grade students as well as a handful of teachers at Dunbar were tested for lead poisoning by the St. Louis City Health Department. The testing was initiated after it was determined there was no evidence of lead contamination in the child's parents' or grandparents' homes.

In recent months several contractors have been wiring the city's 109 schools with fiber-optic computer cables in an effort to make high speed communication available throughout the school system. This involved drilling holes through walls which left behind lead tainted dust which in some cases was not properly cleaned up. It's believed this is the most likely cause of the four-year old's elevated blood lead levels.

The testing at Dunbar found that all 35 additional students tested were determined to be free of lead

poisoning. However due to the possibility of lead contamination at other schools where this work has also been performed, inspections were conducted in nearly 50 schools. Twenty of those were found to be contaminated with lead dust. The problems may have been caused by the failure of one of the contractors to properly clean up the dust created by the drilling.

School superintendent Cleveland Hammonds admitted that the school system is ultimately responsible and said he didn't want to single out anyone for blame. The contractors involved stated they were not aware of any lead problems involved with their drilling work and had not been informed of any potential lead problems prior to starting the job. They were unaware of a problem until being informed by the Health Department in December of the possibility of lead contamination. The Health Department will not assess any penalties since the contractor did not violate any laws.

By the end of the blood testing involving 942 children and 111 adults, there were 15 children who tested positive for lead poisoning, but no adults. This number was well below what officials believed it would be. Previous testing data has shown a lead poisoning rate of 24% for young children in St. Louis. This was a wake up call for school officials and parents. It is hoped this will result in better work procedures for contractors in the future.

Why Should I Care About Lead Poisoning?

Most homes built before 1978 have some type of potential lead exposure problem. This can take the form of lead-based paint on surfaces, old lead water piping, or even lead contamination of the soil in your yard.

Young children are very susceptible to lead poisoning due to their hand to mouth activity. They tend to put almost any object in their mouths, and if it has a sweet taste like lead they'll keep repeating the process.

Do You Know How Much Lead is TOO Much Lead?????

You can't know whether or not you have lead poisoning unless you get tested. In kids, a blood level of ***10 micrograms*** per deciliter is usually considered to be lead poisoning.

But how much is "10 micrograms"?!

- a deciliter is about ½ cup (4 ounces).
- a packet of sweetener (pink or blue stuff) is 1 gram.
- there are one million micrograms in a gram! Imagine separating your sweetener packet into a million parts!!

An amount of lead equal to 10 of these micrograms for every ½ cup of blood is all that it takes to cause lead poisoning!

It takes an incredibly small amount of lead to poison the body!

What's the Harm in Lead?

A blood lead level as low as 10 micrograms per liter (see box at left) in your child's blood is considered lead poisoning. At and above this level a child can suffer mental and physical health problems such as learning disabilities, high blood pressure, and kidney damage.

Did You Know…..

The Missouri General Assembly is considering a bill that would require ***all*** Missouri children under four to be tested for lead poisoning. SB572 is being sponsored by Senator Pat Dougherty of St. Louis. In Illinois, mandatory tests are currently required for kids who the Department of Health considers to be "high risk."

What Can I Do to Protect My Family?

You have a number of options to limit or virtually eliminate the potential of your family being exposed to a lead hazard. The extent to which you can completely eliminate any potential hazard is somewhat limited by how much you can afford to pay. Professional companies are available who can remove the lead or cover (encapsulate) it which is obviously the best way to go if you have the money.

The simplest and least expensive way to limit exposure in your home is to clean the most obvious possible sources of potential lead contamination in your home at least monthly. You should clean up any loose paint particles and wet clean household surfaces with a lead specific detergent or all purpose non-abrasive cleaner. The use of spray cleaner and paper towels is recommended, but if you use a water/detergent solution, be sure to dispose of waste water by flushing it down your toilet, not down the kitchen sink. Never re-use cloth or paper towels that may possibly spread the contamination, and make sure to dispose of all waste materials in sealed plastic bags. Remember to properly protect yourself while cleaning by using a lead rated face mask and disposable clothing if possible. Should you desire to do removal or encapsulation on your own, you can obtain valuable how-to information by calling the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD or on the web at: http://www.epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm

What About Lead in My Yard?!

While crumbling lead paint in housing is generally considered the leading source of lead exposure to kids, outdoor activities where people come into contact with lead contaminated soil also represent a way people can become exposed to dangerous levels of lead. When kids play outside, lead contaminated dirt and dust can get on hands, clothes, toys, and food.

Kids can also breathe lead dust or lead contaminated dirt stirred up by the wind or by outdoor play. When it is dry, dust from bare patches of contaminated soil can get into the air, increasing the chance that it will be inhaled. This dust can get on clothes and shoes and can be tracked into the house. Pets, as well, can track lead-contaminated dirt into houses.

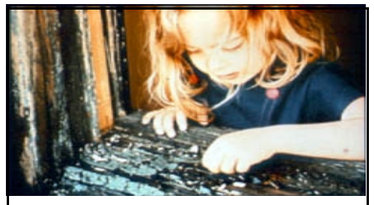
Did You Know…..

The use of lead in gasoline was phased out during the 1970s and banned in the U.S. in 1986. It has been estimated that 4 to 5 million metric tons of lead, coming out of cars as fine dust particles, remain in the environment in dust and soil.

Lead levels in soil around roadways are much higher than natural levels. Some researchers have found that lead levels are highest in older, inner-city neighborhoods near traffic routes and that soil lead levels decrease with distance from the city center.

Why Are Kids More at Risk?

Young kids tend to swallow more lead than adults because kids are more likely to put their hands in their mouths. The most common way for children to swallow lead is by putting their hands or toys that have lead contaminated dirt on them in their mouths. A kid also may put his or her mouth on surfaces having lead-based paint (such as window sills) or he or she may eat lead-paint chips or soil. Kids may also ingest lead if their drinking water contains lead, usually from lead-containing pipes, faucets, and solder in plumbing of older buildings.



Lead-based paint in older homes is the primary cause of childhood lead poisoning in the United States.

In addition to absorbing a greater rate of the lead to which they are exposed, kids also tend to keep a greater amount of lead in their blood, compared to adults. Part of the reason for this is because a child's body is not as good as an adult's at absorbing lead into mineralizing tissue (like bones and teeth). As a result, a greater amount of the lead in a kid's body will remain in the bloodstream and have a poisonous effect on internal organs.

Can My Family Be Tested?

Absolutely! In St. Louis you can contact the Health Department at (314) 612-5460 for lead poisoning and blood testing information if you suspect a problem. If you live in East St. Louis, you can contact the St. Clair County Health Department at (618)233-7769 or the East Side Health District at (618)271-8722 for lead blood testing information. Early detection along with proper care and treatment can reduce or eliminate future health problems.