



For Immediate Release

For More Information Contact:
Kurt Koopmann
Public Information Officer
Galveston County Health District
(409) 938-2211
(409) 392-0007
kkoopman@gchd.org

December 19, 2008

Rebuilding lead safe

Galveston County and Cities – With so many families and contractors working to restore homes in the community after Hurricane Ike, officials with the Galveston County Health District and the Galveston Island Taskforce on Childhood Lead Poisoning are reminding people to take precautions to prevent exposure to harmful elements such as lead.

“As people work to repair their homes they face many challenges,” says Dr. Mark Guidry, Galveston County Health Authority. “They can worry about one less thing if they take steps to prevent lead poisoning.”

When working to repair damage, residents should consider having the area tested for lead-based paint by a certified Lead Inspector or certified Lead Risk Assessor. Contact the Texas Department of State Health Services at (888) 778-9440 to find out who is certified to do this in the area.

Do not use a belt-sander, propane torch, high temperature heat gun, dry scraper, or dry sandpaper to remove lead based paint. These actions create large amounts of dust which can remain in a home long after the work is done. For additional links to resources that may be helpful when remodeling or renovating visit the District's Lead Task Force resources page on the GCHD web site www.gchd.org/lead-information-6-9-08.htm. If you live in the City of Galveston, call the Code Enforcement Division at (409) 797-3660 for assistance with lead regulations. They can also assist those with questions concerning

historic properties. Residents in other areas of the county should contact their appropriate city or county building officials.

If lead-based paint has been detected in a home, moving the family should be considered, especially children and pregnant women until work is completed. This is important since lead exposure can harm unborn babies. Even children who seem healthy can have high levels of lead in their bodies. A medical provider may test for lead. Testing is done routinely for children 0 – 6 years of age who are at risk. Testing is also recommended if a child or adult is exposed to lead based paint and dust generated as a result of renovations.

If renovations or remodeling has already been completed and dust that contains lead may have been released, children should be tested for lead. Additional steps to reduce the risk of lead poisoning include: cleaning floors, window frames, window sills, and other surfaces weekly using a mop or sponge with warm water and a general all-purpose cleaner; 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; keep children from chewing window sills or other painted surfaces and clean or remove shoes before entering your home to avoid tracking in lead from soil.

Contractors should also be aware they can bring lead home in work clothes and other items which can put their own family members at risk. If possible, shower and change work clothes before coming home or use disposable gloves and protective clothing that can be discarded after a day's work. If disposable clothing is not used work clothes should be washed separately from the rest of the family laundry. Contract workers are also encouraged to use respirators to prevent inhaling dust that may contain lead.

Guidry says prior to the hurricane, one local contractor was diagnosed with lead poisoning as a result of lead-based paint exposure during renovations. The very high lead level was reported to the district, and the district's epidemiologist investigated the case. To treat the lead poisoning, the contractor was hospitalized, and then received medication with long-term follow-up care.

Guidry emphasizes testing is important because many persons will show no symptoms of lead poisoning. In other cases, symptoms may be vague but can include fatigue, irritability, insomnia, anorexia, constipation, difficulty concentrating and headaches. At higher levels dangerous consequences may include neurological symptoms, seizures and even death.

Lead poisoning has previously been identified as a problem in area homes. In 2008 as of December there have been 24 cases of lead poisoning reported in

Galveston County. 17 of those were on Galveston Island in zip codes 77550 and 77551.

For more information about healthy homes visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Healthy Homes website www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/healthyhomes.htm.