

Mandatory Lead Certification for all Philadelphia Contractors

Survey Takeaways

Majority of respondents:



Live in homes with lead paint



Were unaware of the RRP certification for contractors working in homes with lead paint



Found dust in their home after renovations



Stayed in their home during renovations; some with children under six



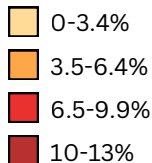
Incorrectly believe water is the primary driver of lead exposure instead of paint

Unsafe renovations in older homes spread lead dust around the home, putting children at risk.¹

Every year, over 2,000 Philadelphia children are diagnosed with lead poisoning.¹ Elevated lead levels cause irreversible damage, including decreased IQ and attention and behavior disorders.¹ **Dust from lead paint is the largest source of childhood lead exposure.**¹ Unsafe renovations in homes with lead paint spread lead dust around the home, which can expose the occupants and contractors to dangerous levels of lead. Only 13% of Philadelphia contractors have received training and certification to work in homes with lead paint.

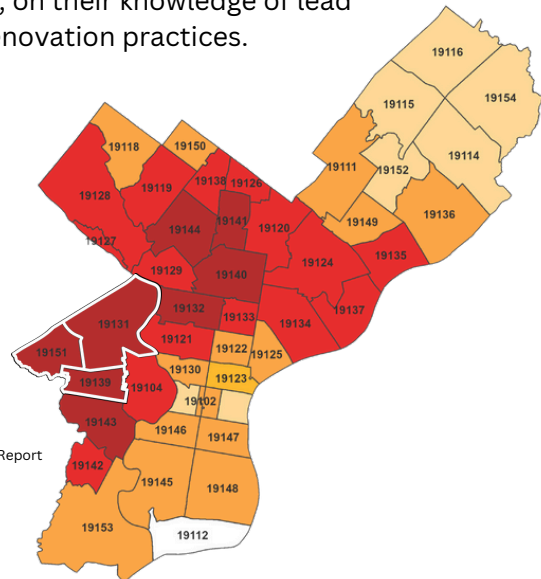
Science Shop is a participatory research project focused on community environmental concerns. Resident focus groups in Overbrook revealed that lead exposure was a primary concern. Overbrook has some of the highest rates of children with elevated blood lead levels in Philadelphia (10-13%). In 2025, we conducted a survey of 54 residents, primarily from West Philadelphia in zip codes 19139, 19151, and 19131, on their knowledge of lead hazards and lead-safe renovation practices.

Percent of children with elevated blood lead levels



Source: PDPH, 2022 Lead Surveillance Report

Study area



Our survey uncovered that the majority of respondents were not aware of the EPA Renovation Repair and Painting (RRP) certification that is required for contractors working in homes with lead paint.

The EPA RRP rule requires that any renovation, repair, or painting being performed that can disrupt lead paint in any pre-1978 home, preschool, or child care facility must be done by an EPA certified renovator. This certification ensures that contractors know how to follow lead-safe work practices, limiting the spread of lead dust around the home. 84% of survey respondents did not try to find a contractor who was certified to work in homes with lead paint and 82% of respondents found dust in their home after work was completed.

Existing Legislation in Philadelphia

Rental Property Lead Certification

Law, Bill #180936: As of October 1st 2020, the Rental Property Lead Certification Law requires landlords to test and certify rental properties as lead-safe or lead-free in order to apply for or renew a rental license or new a lease.

Amendment to Construction License, The Philadelphia Code

6-604: Any person performing asbestos abatement, renovation, repair, or demolition work which disturbs or damages asbestos materials is required to be certified by the Department of Licenses and Inspections. Certification is valid for 13 months, no fee is charged for certification.

Success in Other Jurisdictions:

Rochester, NY and Baltimore, MD, have legislation in place that enforce EPA RRP certification through fines, suspension, or denial of rental license.^{5,7}

In Rochester, after two years of implementing this law, the number of children with elevated blood lead levels reduced by over 50%.⁶ In Maryland, childhood lead poisoning cases have decreased 98% since the law was first enacted, while US blood lead levels decreased 78% during the same time frame.⁸

There is no local enforcement ensuring that homeowners or landlords are using lead certified contractors.

Enforcement of this law is reactive based mainly on tips of violations. **Without effective enforcement, children can be exposed to lead if the renovations disrupt lead paint, even when that housing unit was determined to be lead-safe in the last inspection.** Disrupted lead paint chips and dust containing high lead levels would continually expose children until the next inspection for rental properties and indefinitely for homeowners not subject to the lead safe certification regulation for rental properties. Requiring all contractors operating in the City of Philadelphia to be RRP certified would reduce the exposure to all children living in renovated homes by improving the renovation process with respect to lead. **Pittsburgh has already accomplished this through their Lead Safety Law (#2021-2101).**⁹ The city already requires asbestos certification for contractors, lead certification could follow this same model.

In Philadelphia, there is also no requirement for relocation of tenants during a significant renovation. Studies have shown that children are at increased risk for lead exposure during improperly conducted renovations. One analysis showed that children whose housing underwent interior renovation had 12% higher mean blood lead levels by two years of age compared with children whose housing units were not renovated.¹⁰ In Maryland, rental property owners are required to provide permanent relocation of tenants to a property that is certified lead free or provide temporary relocation during renovation on lead paint containing properties.⁸

EPA RRP training in Philadelphia is underutilized.

To become RRP certified, a contractor must take a training course from a private training provider accredited by EPA and pay a certification fee, both of which are valid for 5 years. The cost of the course is set by the private training provider and varies, but averages \$186, and the contractor EPA registration costs \$300, making that annualized cost less than \$100 a year, which should not be prohibitive for most contractors.¹¹ Several training providers in Philadelphia have capacity to accommodate additional contractors.

Recommendations:

- Require all contractors doing work in Philadelphia to be EPA RRP lead certified in order to obtain or renew their contracting license.
- Require relocation of tenants during housing renovations to prevent exposure.

Scan to view references

