

LEGISLATION

Laws may need to be changed to meet lead-free homes goal

Nearly one-fourth of housing units in U.S. have significant levels of lead present

By Karl Hille
Examiner Staff Writer

Rental and home-ownership law, as well as testing procedures for lead in homes, may need to be changed if Maryland is to meet the goal of raising lead-free children by 2010.

Maryland legislation is not burdensome, said Brian Devlin, rental manager for the St. Ambrose

affordable housing program in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

"Since the mid-1990s, you've had to register your rental properties with the Maryland Department of the Environment," Devlin said. "You've had to go through a risk-reduction before people can move into your house."

Still, he said, the law is easy to comply with from an owner's perspective. Some areas may need to be strengthened, like requiring a chemical test rather than a visual inspection of cleaned up homes.

Although she cites a 97 percent success rate statewide, Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning Director Ruth Ann Norton said Maryland law does little to compel pri-

vate homeowners to clean up or test their properties. That and other loopholes have made the final 3 percent a big challenge.

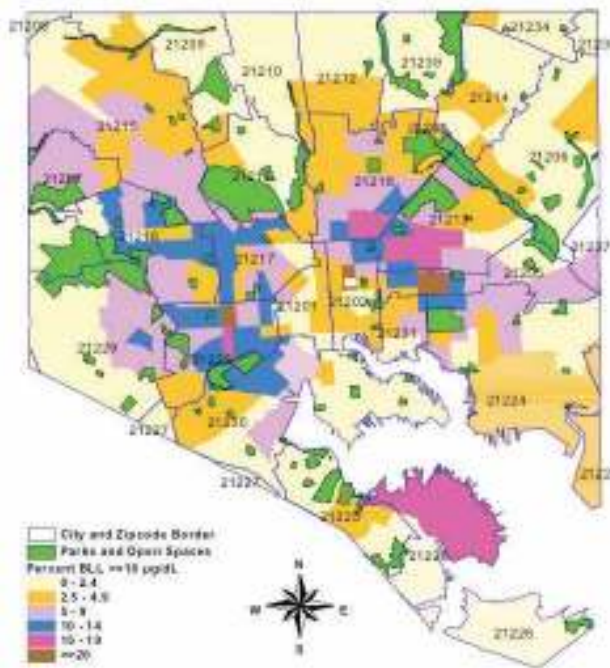
Last year, 1,331 Maryland children were diagnosed with dangerous levels of lead in their blood; most came into contact with deteriorating lead-laced paint, dust and building materials in their homes. While less than 3 percent of Maryland children have been poisoned by lead in and around their homes, at least two out of three children have never been tested.

Nearly one-fourth of the housing units in the United States have significant levels of lead present in dust, soil or paint, according to the peer-reviewed journal Environmental Health Perspectives.

But there is something you can do to protect your children.

Researchers at the Saint Louis University School of Public Health report in the January issue of Environmental Science & Technology that all-purpose floor and counter detergents are as effective as specialized lead-treating solvents at

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT
Lead Poisoning Prevention Program: Childhood Lead Registry
Percent of Children 0-72 Months Tested for Lead with Blood Lead Level \geq 10 μ g/dL
Baltimore City Census Tracts: 2003-2005



removing lead-bearing dust from wood, wallpaper and vinyl flooring.

Devlin said many of St. Ambrose's properties have been completely gutted — except where historic preservation standards demand windows be preserved. New

drywall and windows and testing the water supply should remove or identify most sources of possible poisoning.

This is the second in a series commemorating National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week.

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One month after shooting, parents try to cope

Evil shattered innocence when a deranged gunman opened fire in an Amish schoolhouse just north of Maryland.

Now, one month after the murders of five little girls, WJZ-13 Eyewitness News talked with a couple who counseled the victims' parents.

Jonas and Anne Beiler grew up Amish and have since left the church. They opened a counseling center and met personally with the victims' families. They also met with the teacher who ran from the school to call 911.

Jonas Beiler says the teacher has tremendous survivors' guilt, and he still remembers what she said. "[The teacher said] 'I bailed out on my kids, feeling like I could have done more,'

and you just have to help people like this bring it to rest and say, 'There's nothing you could do.'"

Anne Beiler met with one mother who lost two daughters. "She just felt so sad, and looked so sad. I know that she's forgiven, but she feels just like anyone else who's lost a child," she said.

The Beilers told WJZ-13 that they never heard any bitterness or any anger. In fact, forgiveness is an integral part of the Amish religion. Jonas Beiler says, "If this is what life gives us, we will do our best to work through it, and our choice is to forgive those who wrong us."

Still, the families ask why Charles Roberts, a seemingly dedicated fa-

ther and husband, planned the attack. Suicide notes cited the death of his own daughter and anguish over molesting young relatives. Now the outside world is trying to soothe their pain.

Scott Sundberg of Mennonite Disaster Services shared with WJZ-13 hundreds of support letters. He says, "Almost as soon as we heard about it, we started receiving calls and e-mails."

"Most days, I would stop and pause and lower my head, and truly the tears would just fall," Sundberg added.

Tears for the little ones who died inside the little schoolhouse; their memories will live forever. - WJZ

Maryland Army reservists honored at Fort Meade

By Adam May

Army Reservists in Maryland are back home being honored for their bravery in Iraq.

In light of President Bush's week-end visit to Ho Chi Min City, the war in Iraq has been compared a lot to Vietnam this week. But a recent ceremony at Fort Meade was one stark difference.

"I'm a two-tour vet of Vietnam and we had no such welcoming home," says Army Rep. John Meyers.

Members of the Army Reservist's 80th Division First Brigade were

honored with flags, pins and awards after serving more than a year far from their Maryland homes.

"Their mission was mostly a military training mission, training Iraqi army and Iraqi Security forces," says Maj. Gen. David Evans, commander 80th Division.

"I was wounded in combat and got the Purple Heart. It was obviously an award I received; a lot of my buddies didn't make it back," says Army Staff Sgt. Shawn Boiko.

Those soldiers were also remembered as others, now back home, hope this uncertain war does not claim many more lives.

"In the future, I believe we'll be there in their capacity, but we need

our soldiers home, there are things over there we can still do, but other things we don't need to be doing, the Iraqis need to do on their own, so in the future we need to bring more of our soldiers home," says Army Sgt. First Class Anthony Simpson.

As the future of the U.S. mission in Iraq hangs in the balance after the post-election congressional shift in power, some soldiers make their own comparisons to Vietnam.

"Where we were, not a lot of positive stories, where we were was hell on Earth," says Boiko.

Since the war started, 56 members of the military from Maryland have been killed in Iraq. - WJZ