



National Center for Healthy Housing

For Immediate Release

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Newly Published Research Confirms that Visual Assessments Alone Cannot Ensure that Lead Levels in Homes are Below Clearance Values

(Columbia, MD, July 11, 2007) — A study published in the scientific journal *Environmental Research*, by the National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) showed that 73% of homes that followed the requirements of 1994 Maryland Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing Law had at least one dust sample that exceeded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's dust lead standards that were in effect at that time.

Children living in housing with deteriorated lead-based paint and lead in household dust and soil are at risk of having elevated blood lead levels. Baltimore City contains a disproportionately high number of residences with children who have elevated blood lead levels compared with other areas of the state. Since 1993, there has been a 95% reduction in blood lead levels and a 93% decrease in Baltimore City.

A 1994 Maryland law, (EA 6–8) became fully effective on February 24, 1996 and applied to all pre-1950 rental housing and at a property owner's option, to any residential rental property constructed after 1949 but before 1978. The law requires a set of risk reduction activities followed by an independent visual inspection without dust sampling. Alternatively, property owners may conduct dust sampling to verify that dust lead loadings are within acceptable limits. Every affected property was required to have at least one risk reduction certificate by February 24, 2006. Approximately 90% of properties met that standard.

NCHH evaluated the ability of visual inspection to predict treatment completion and dust lead loadings. Study risk assessors conducted visual assessments and dust wipe sampling in 52 Baltimore dwellings before treatment. After treatment, Maryland-certified visual inspectors conducted the law's required visual inspection, followed by the study risk assessors, who performed a separate visual assessment and collected dust wipe samples. One year later, study risk assessors performed another visual assessment and dust wipe sampling in 34 of the 52 original dwellings.

“Visual assessments alone, without dust lead testing, did not ensure that prescribed treatments were completed or that dust lead loadings were below clearance values. Study results suggest that visual assessments combined with dust lead testing are the best way to ensure that lead levels are low enough not to pose a threat to occupants,” according to Rebecca Morley, executive director of the National Center for Healthy Housing.

According to Ruth Ann Norton, Executive Director, Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning, "This study confirms that the safest known standard to insure that lead dust hazards are not present in units following lead hazard reduction treatments is to require mandatory lead dust clearance testing."

Although each unit passed the independent visual inspection prescribed by EA 6-8, the study risk assessor team's post-treatment visual assessments found one or more incomplete lead hazard reduction treatments in 88% of dwellings. The three most common incomplete treatments reported were non-intact paint, one or more painted doors continuing to rub and/or bind, and visible paint chips and debris. In 2001, the lead law was amended to prohibit the dust test option if any chipping, peeling, or flaking paint is present. Overall, 73% of units had one or more immediate post-treatment dust lead loading results exceeding the 1995 EPA/HUD dust lead standards that were in effect at the time of the study. One-year post-treatment loadings remained significantly below baseline levels for floors but not windowsills or troughs.

Since 1996, over 75,000 inspections of Baltimore City properties have been conducted to meet the Maryland Law requirements. Importantly, for over 70% of the properties, property owners chose to do dust testing, rather than the risk reduction treatments followed by a visual inspection.

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NCHH is the only national technical and scientific non-profit organization dedicated to developing and promoting practical measures to protect children from residential environmental hazards while preserving affordable housing. NCHH develops scientifically valid and practical strategies to make homes safe from hazards, to alert low-income families about housing-related health risks, and to help them protect their children. NCHH also works with governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop standards and programs and guide their implementation through insurers, lenders, federal and state laws and regulations, community organizations, and the courts.