

State doles out fines to violators of lead laws

Sara Michael, The Examiner

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BALTIMORE -

State environmental inspectors have a close eye on Baltimore property owners, slapping several with hefty fines for lead violations.

“It sends a message to other property owners to get in line,” said Ruth Anne Norton, executive director of the Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning and a “huge supporter of enforcement.”

The Maryland Department of the Environment’s Waste Management Administration handed out penalties of more than \$5,000 to seven property owners in Baltimore City in the first two weeks of May.

They were fined for violating state lead laws. Two property owners received \$38,500 fines, and one was fined \$44,000.

“Many of the homes in the Baltimore area are over 50 years old and qualify for the lead prevention program,” Maryland Department of the Environment spokesman Robert Ballinger said.

Lead-based paint was used in many homes until it was banned in 1978. Lead poisoning can cause hyperactivity, explosive behavior, and attention and cognitive disorders in children, said Madeleine Shea, assistant commissioner for the Baltimore City Health Department’s Healthy Homes division.

The Baltimore property owners were cited for failure to register with the state or not complying with risk reduction standards, such as removing or repainting chipping or peeling paint, according to the law.

A few of the violators were familiar names to Norton, whose group refers properties to the state agency.

The coalition has a goal that no child in Maryland will have lead poisoning over the federal limit by 2010. In 2005, more than 1,300 children were found with unacceptable lead levels in their blood, Norton said.

The fines, she said, are “a great stride toward our goal.”

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