



# National Center for Healthy Housing

## Essential Maintenance Practices

The concept of “essential maintenance practices” (EMPs) was developed to deal with lead-based paint in older housing in recognition that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” While some homes need dedicated “lead abatement projects” by certified contractors, in most cases, hazards can be avoided in the first place through good maintenance and common sense safeguards. Some EMPs are specific to lead safety, such as avoiding paint removal practices that generate and spread dangerous lead dust. Others address conditions that can cause multiple problems. For example, water leaks, water damage, and excessive moisture can encourage the growth of mold, mildew, and pests, which can cause asthma and other health problems, in addition to causing paint to deteriorate. Periodic visual inspections can identify clues to and causes of water leaks and moisture problems so that low-cost repairs “nip problems in the bud.” The concept of “enlightened maintenance practices” is at the foundation of healthy homes. The EPA/HUD five-hour training course in lead-safe work practices (LSWP) offers a model for conveying practical information to existing trades and can benefit all those whose work encounters painted surfaces in older housing.

## Essential Maintenance Practices to Reduce Lead Hazards

In 1995, a broad-based national task force chartered by Congress reached almost unanimous consensus on recommendations for controlling lead-based paint hazards in private housing. As part of its comprehensive recommendations, *Putting the Pieces Together: Controlling Lead Hazards in the Nation's Housing* (July 1995), the Task Force on Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction and Financing called for six Essential Maintenance Practices by owners of pre-1978 rental properties that may contain lead-based paint. These Essential Maintenance Practices are relatively inexpensive initial steps property owners need to take to reduce the chances that hazards will develop, avoid the inadvertent creation of hazards, and provide an early warning system to alert owners to deteriorating paint.

It is important to understand that Essential Maintenance Practices are a "floor," not a "ceiling," as these practices were not designed to control lead hazards in units that are judged to be higher-risk based on their age or condition (e.g., construction before 1950, extensive deteriorated paint, deferred maintenance, etc.).

## Renovation, Repair and Painting

Contractors and property owners must comply with EPA's Renovation, Repair and Painting Rule (RRP) by taking a training course, such as the [EPA-accredited course](#) offered by NCHH, to learn how to perform lead-safe renovation in houses built before 1978.

*Building a healthy home environment for All Children*