

Natural Disasters in the Southeast Cause EPA to Urge Caution on Restoration Activities Involving Lead-Based Paint

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(ATLANTA – May 11, 2011) – Due to recent tornadoes, severe and straight-line winds, storms, and flooding in the Southeastern United States, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 4 is cautioning homeowners, volunteers, and other workers to take steps to ensure that individuals, especially children, are not at increased risk for lead poisoning, because of clean up and/or repair work. EPA urges pregnant women and children to keep away from work that could disturb lead-based paint and that those working on potential lead-based paint surfaces take precautions to prevent the spread of lead dust.

Lead dust may pose a hazard to children and pregnant women during cleanup resulting from natural disasters. Lead contaminated dust is the most significant source of lead exposure for children. Common renovation activities like sanding, cutting and demolition can create hazardous lead dust and chips by disturbing lead-based paint, which can be harmful to adults and children. Lead-based paint was used in more than 38 million homes until it was banned for residential use in 1978. Lead exposure can cause reduced IQ, learning disabilities, developmental delays, and behavioral problems in young children.

The Renovation, Repair, and Painting Rule (RRP) requires that workers disturbing lead-based paint be trained and certified, notify residents of the lead dust hazards, and follow lead safe work practices, in order to reduce exposure to lead dust. Because of the nature of the storm recovery work, certain emergency provisions in the RRP apply. Work covered under the RRP rule on storm damaged housing will not require advance notice or trained renovators to remove materials from homes. Emergency renovation activities are also exempt from the warning sign, containment, waste-handling, training, and certification requirements to the extent necessary to respond to the emergency. Other renovation activities are subject to the rule requirements. Volunteer workers, who do not receive compensation for work, are not required to be certified, but should educate themselves about lead-safe work practices, so as not to inadvertently cause hazards for themselves or other family members.

The RRP program mandates that contractors, property managers and others working for compensation, in homes and child-occupied facilities built before 1978, must be trained and use lead-safe work practices. They are also required to provide a copy of the lead pamphlet “Renovate Right; Important Lead Hazard Information for Families, Child Care Providers and Schools” to owners and occupants before starting renovation work.

You can learn more about protecting your family from lead-based paint and EPA’s lead program at <http://www.epa.gov/lead> or by contacting the National Lead Information Center at 800-424-LEAD (5323).