



Builders, landlords brace for EPA's new lead-paint rules

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Ken Halbersma has been picking away at a 1950s-era home in Cannon Township that he bought to rehab and rent.

He shored up the roof and tore the interior down to the studs.

He did it "in the normal way a rehabber would do it," he said. "Just rip everything out and take it to the landfill."

Beginning next April, however, there will be a new normal.

The walls he removed were coated with lead-based paint, and new U.S. [Environmental Protection Agency](#) rules for remodeling homes with lead-based paint take effect April 2010.

GET THE LEAD OUT

Beginning April 2010, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency enacts the Lead-Based Paint Renovation, Repair and Painting [Program](#) governing work done in homes likely to have lead paint:

Who is affected?

- Residential landlords
- General contractors
- Subcontractors, including plumbers, painters, carpenters and electricians

What is required?

- Training and certification
- Informing tenants/residents of lead hazards and work procedures
- Posting signs to keep area clear
- Use of lead-safe work practices, including covering surfaces with plastic to catch debris
- Document work and retain for three years
- Punishment for violators has not been established

They involve eight hours of training and certification, a lot of thick plastic sheeting, duct tape, signs, pamphlets and testing.

"It would have cost a couple thousand dollars more in time and money to do it their way," he said. But he wasn't complaining.

"This should have been enacted years ago," said Halbersma, 55. "I feel most of the damage from lead-based paint has already been done."

The new regulations were years in the making, said Paul Haan, executive director of the [Healthy Homes Coalition](#) of West Michigan. But they are better late than never.

While significant strides have been made in reducing childhood lead poisoning that can cause brain damage, he said, "an increasing percent of the kids affected appear to be affected by remodeling activities."

The regulations will apply to contractors or landlords working in a rental unit. A homeowner is not required to adhere to them -- but is highly encouraged to do so.

Many people are just learning about the changes.

Richard TenHoor recently joined the [Rental Property Owners Association](#) of Kent County as its new lead-safe outreach coordinator to train and educate members on the new rules. He already held one class and has more scheduled. Official EPA training doesn't start until October, but TenHoor said his class will cut the required eight-hour training in half.

He said he didn't hear much complaining about the requirements at his first class.

"It will add some cost, but I don't believe it will be prohibitive," he said. "There will be more prep time. The good thing is, when you are cleaning up at the end, it should make it more efficient."

But not everyone is as optimistic. John Leegwater, one of the owners of [Midtown](#) Craftsmen LLC in Grand Rapids, which specializes in historic restoration, said it could cost as much as \$700 to get his company and staff certified.

"What happens to the guy who works out of his house and is the sole proprietor?" Leegwater said.

That's what Scott Rollenhagen, of [Rollenhagen Builders](#) Inc., in Ada Township, wants to know. He is on the job all day and manages his business from home at night.

"I know there is probably sound thinking behind it," he said, "but I'm not happy about it, so I can't endorse it."

He said 30 to 40 percent of his work is on homes built before 1978, when lead paint was outlawed.

And he worries unscrupulous builders who skirt the rules will get more work.

"I've got to post signs, receive training, clean up, document -- it all takes time and costs money," he said. "The same guy will be less expensive because he's already not doing things properly."

Costs a concern

Landlord Kent Ott took TenHoor's first training class through the RPOA and supports the efforts to keep families healthy, but he, too, is concerned about added costs.

"Especially in the realm of the economic situation we're in," said Ott, who owns a 16-unit apartment house in Heritage Hill. "It's going to be more costly now to do the maintenance and repairs where it involves painted surfaces, especially in old historic structures."

But he is resigned to the new rules.

"Buy stock in duct tape companies and plastic sheeting," he said, "because people will be using a lot of it in the future."

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