

EPA rule could spike home repair costs

Affects homes built before 1978

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- By Jessica Leffler

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) -- The Environmental Protection Agency passed a new rule that could hike up the cost of home repairs.

The rule mandates contractors must be certified for projects that could disturb lead-based paint in buildings constructed before 1978 -- to prevent lead contamination. It aims to protect people -- especially children -- from lead poisoning.

This rule is long overdue, some groups argue. But contractors told 24 Hour News 8 on Wednesday although safety is important, this rule could take things too far.

The process is extensive, said Michael Wierstra, the remodeling manager at Nugent Builders.

"It's going to fall back the consumer, basically," said Wierstra, who is certified.

After sealing off construction site areas inside and outside, all debris must be wrapped up, taped in plastic bags and disposed.

Then, the next stage of cleanup begins.

"But then the areas are cleaned up with HEPA filter vacuums -- not just a typical shop vac, but then all the woodwork basically needs to be wiped down with a Dawn liquid detergent," Wierstra said.

This new rule adds a lot of extra steps, he added.

"It is frustrating to me, like I said, it's just poor timing across the board," Wierstra said. "It's a product that's been banned for 32 years, and all of a sudden it's an issue -- when the construction trade is at its lowest in 70 years."

But 41 percent of children who have lead poisoning have been in a home that has been remodeled in the past 12 months, said Paul Haan of the Healthy Homes Coalition.

In 2008, there were 100 children in Grand Rapids that were victims of lead poisoning. This measure is necessary, Haan added.

"Our position ... first of all, is (whether) the child's well-being is worth it," he said. "And second of all ... these are things that contractors are going to be doing to some degree already."

Wierstra estimates the new rule could add 25 to 30 percent extra in home renovation costs, and could have a negative impact on construction jobs.

"This state's already seen some pretty big blows in the construction industry and I think the timing is just really poor," Wierstra said.

On the Web:

Healthy Homes Coalition

Information from the EPA

