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[Homeowner Interviews](#) • [Program Background](#) • [Neighborhood Data and Illustration](#) • [Health Statistics](#) • [Photo Opportunities](#)

NEWS RELEASE



Grand Rapids Neighborhoods Kicking Out Lead

City of Grand Rapids' Lead Poisoning Prevention Program Completes 1,000th Home

July 7, 2011 - Grand Rapids — This month the City of Grand Rapids *Get The Lead Out!* program celebrates a milestone of eliminating lead in 1,000 homes today at a news conference from 3:00-3:30 p.m. in Rosa Parks Circle.

An estimated 90% of all childhood lead poisoning cases in Kent County are the result of deteriorating lead-based paint and lead dust found in the home. This dangerous dust can be found in any home built before 1978, the year lead-based paint was banned. More than 85% of the housing stock in the City of Grand Rapids was built before 1978.

“Kicking out lead and its related health problems requires fixing the problem homes before a child ever moves in,” says Paul Haan, coordinator and partner in the *Get the Lead Out!* program. Since 2004, the City of Grand Rapids Community Development Department has secured nearly \$13.5 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to support this local campaign to fix lead hazards in homes where young children reside.

Lead can be found in homes in northwest, southwest, and southeast neighborhoods. Nearly 50% of the homes that have been made lead safe are owner-occupied, with the remaining being rental property. Local program partners include the City of Grand Rapids, the Kent County Health Department, LINC, the Rental Property Owners Association and the Healthy Homes Coalition.

Indicating the *1,000 Homes* art exhibit (created by volunteers) placed in Rosa Parks Circle July 7-13, Haan suggests we imagine the number of infants and children living in these homes, now and in the future. “Thank you, City of Grand Rapids, for having the foresight and commitment to undertake this program,” says Haan.

In 2004, *Get The Lead Out!* program staff and volunteers began going door-to-door to get the word out about the dangers of lead in homes built before 1978. The team continues this effort, alerting parents to conditions around a home that can indicate hazardous lead paint. City of Grand Rapids Community Development Department staff process applications. Abatement plans are then established and carried out for each home by city staff and staff from LINC, a community revitalization organization based in Grand Rapids.

Lead is pollution. And unlike some of the pollutants around us, the knowledge and tools exist to do something about it. In addition to reducing the incidence of lead poisoning, this funding has created jobs for contractors, helps sustain quality housing in older Grand Rapids neighborhoods, and helps retain young families in Grand Rapids’ neighborhoods.

Lead poisoning causes irreversible health issues, especially for children less than six years of age. Lead interferes with the development of the nervous system and internal organs. The risk from lead poisoning is greatest in children one and two years of age. Pregnant women can pass lead on to their fetus during pregnancy.

The fight against lead poisoning has made a tremendous impact on the health of children living in homes across the city of Grand Rapids. In 2003, the year before home repairs began, 279 children 0-5 years of age were identified with elevated blood lead levels in Grand Rapids. This past year (2010), just 64 children tested positive for lead poisoning in Grand Rapids.

The Kent County Health Department has been a partner in the program since its inception. In addition to targeting children with elevated blood lead levels, the Health Department employs an Outreach Worker that targets Spanish-speaking households. As a result of the Health Department’s efforts, the number of children needing case management has consistently declined over the years.

“Our success reaching and eliminating lead from 1,000 homes is strongly tied to word of mouth,” says Haan, who is also executive director of the Healthy Homes Coalition. “Many of the calls we receive for help and information originate from referrals from partner organizations and neighbors reaching out to one another. We are counting on that same cooperation to help Grand Rapids continue its commitment to eliminating lead poisoning in our community. Visit www.GetTheLeadOutGR.com for tips, grant applications, and a calendar of free workshops on how to identify lead and solve lead exposure issues in homes.



Since the original grant, more than 800 people have sought out workshops to learn about health dangers and safer painting, remodeling and cleaning practices. The Rental Property Owners Association offers frequent training for landlords on the new federal requirement for lead-safe work practices. The Healthy Homes Coalition offers monthly classes on lead-safe remodeling and low-cost strategies for controlling lead hazards.

The Healthy Homes Coalition is an independent, local non-profit organization that seeks to ensure that all children have the opportunity to grow up in a healthy home that is free from environmental hazards. A list of workshops and events scheduled for May, June and July can be found at www.HealthyHomesCoalition.org.

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2011 Lead Safe Home Repair & Painting Classes

The Healthy Homes Coalition is teaming up with Home Repair Services to offers classes for do-it-yourselfers on how to repair or paint homes in a lead safe manner. Register by calling (616) 241-3300.

Friday, July 8, 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

Thursday, August 11, 9:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Friday, September 9, 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

Monday, October 3, 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 10, 9:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Friday, December 9, 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

Do-It-Yourself Tips and Videos

www.healthyhomescoalition.org