

“But I’m Not Their Mother!”

“Remember to wash your hands!” Despite our mothers’ best efforts, many of us still don’t do too well. We’ve heard that the average American male spends no more than five seconds washing his hands!

But when it comes to preventing lead poisoning, washing up is a big deal. Lead on your hands gets on your food, drink or cigarette, and then it’s straight into your mouth. Even small amounts of swallowed lead can mean a serious case of lead poisoning. And any lead dust taken home on skin or clothes at the end of the day can be passed on to young children or pregnant women. Both are extremely sensitive to the toxic effects of even small amounts of “take-home lead.”

“But I’m not their mother!” Some supervisors just give up trying to get workers to wash up. The mother/enforcer role leaves them feeling embarrassed, frustrated, and angry. Also many employers feel that it really shouldn’t be their job to enforce personal hygiene on the job. But the fact is, when it comes to lead -- Cal/OSHA feels otherwise. Here are some tips on how to protect workers and their families, comply with Cal/OSHA, and maintain your sanity.

Are your sinks up to the job? Do you have enough sinks? Are they big enough? You should be able to do a good job of washing all exposed skin – hands and wrists definitely, but also bare arms, and face, neck and throat. Are the sinks located where they will be used? Is there always enough water, soap and clean towels? These things send a strong message about how serious you are about doing things right.

Would you want to use it? We’ve all had to use some pretty scary restroom sinks. How do workers feel about using the sinks at your job site? Unfortunately, sinks won’t clean themselves; so make sure that someone has the responsibility to check and clean them regularly. Are the sinks well lit? Make sure that workers, and their supervisors, can clearly see what they are doing.

Wash-up time is work time. Workers should be given enough time to clean up before their lunch break, and again before the end of the shift. This helps ensure that they spend more than five seconds washing their hands! It also means that washing up well is not optional. It happens on paid time and it is part of the job.



Have you made yourself clear? Be sure that you have clearly explained the importance of good hygiene to employees. Also be sure you have explained that you expect everyone to comply. Do you set a good example by always washing up well when you leave a lead work area?

Still having problems? Find out why. Are you still frustrated with workers’ lack of compliance? Spend some time trying to find out what the problem is. Watch what’s going on and talk to a few workers. You may discover things you didn’t know. For example, did you know that some people are reluctant to wash with cold water because they believe it causes arthritis?

Remember, you’re the boss. The law holds you responsible for what happens on the job site. If you’ve done your part, you can expect workers to do theirs. Cal/OSHA actually wants to see evidence that, when necessary, you are enforcing safety on the job.

Resources

The Cal/OSHA Lead Standards require employers to assure that employees wash their hands and face before eating, drinking or smoking. Summaries of the Cal/OSHA lead standards are on our website:

- Cal/OSHA Lead in Construction Standard - <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ohb/OLPPP/licsumm.pdf>
- Cal/OSHA General Industry Lead Standard - <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ohb/pdf/gsummary.pdf>

Cal/OSHA washing facilities standards spell out the minimum requirements:

- In Construction - <http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/1527.html>
- In General Industry - <http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3366.html>

Occupational Lead Poisoning Prevention Program Publications that highlight things employers and workers can do to prevent lead poisoning are available on our website:

- <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ohb/OLPPP/leadpub.htm>



Occupational Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

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Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor

Kim Belshé, Secretary
Health and Human Services Agency

Sandra Shewry
Director, Department of Health Services

Workplace Lead Helpline:

(510) 622-4332

CA Relay Service (800) 735-2929

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