

November 2013

Focus on...

CDPH Calls for New Limit on Workplace Lead

The current Cal/OSHA lead standards – employer requirements to protect worker health – are based on lead toxicity information that is now over 30 years old.

The [California Department of Public Health's](#) (CDPH) [Occupational Lead Poisoning Prevention Program](#) has recommended a dramatic reduction in the amount of lead in workplace air allowed under the standards (Permissible Exposure Limit, or PEL).

The recommended health-based PEL calls for the amount of lead in the air workers breathe to be kept at or below 0.5 – 2.1 micrograms lead per cubic meter of air ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). This is necessary to keep workers' blood lead levels at or below 5 to 10 micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$) over a working lifetime.



Photo: Demolition worker disturbing old lead paint

Scientific evidence demonstrates that adverse health effects begin to emerge with chronic blood lead levels at 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ and possibly even at lower levels. For comparison, the current Cal/OSHA PEL is 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

Lead in the Workplace – the New Science was a one-day scientific symposium moderated by John Howard, MD, Director of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). The symposium covered the health effects of low-level lead exposure and the newly released Cal/EPA report on modeling the air lead/blood lead relationship. A CDPH representative explained the basis for the health-based PEL recommendation to Cal/OSHA.

The symposium, sponsored by UC Berkeley's Center for Occupational and Environmental Health Continuing Education Program, was on Wednesday, November 13, 2013.

Resources

[Recommendations for improving the Cal/OSHA Lead Standards](#)

OHb improves California worker health and safety through prevention activities. We gather information on job hazards, test new approaches to prevent worker injury and illness, and help make changes at the workplace.

Email OHW@cdph.ca.gov with feedback about this update or change of address.



Occupational Health Branch
CA Department of Public Health
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