

# SafetyToolboxTalks

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## Lead Awareness

Lead (Pb) is a heavy metal that can threaten the health of workers in many occupations. Lead can be inhaled or swallowed and once inside the body tends to remain in tissue and organs. Eventually, after repeated exposures, lead build-up becomes toxic.

You can be exposed to lead in a variety of ways, including:

- Breathing workplace air (lead smelting, refining and manufacturing industries)
- Eating lead-based paint chips
- Drinking water that comes from lead pipes or soldered fittings
- Breathing or ingesting contaminated soil, dust, air, or water near waste sites
- Breathing tobacco smoke
- Eating contaminated food grown on soil containing lead or eating food covered with lead containing dust

If you are not properly protected, your chances of getting lead poisoning increase.

### HOW LEAD CAN HARM YOU

Lead can be absorbed into the body by inhaling it or ingesting it. As exposure to lead continues, the amount stored in your body may increase. Even though you may not be aware of any immediate symptoms of the disease, the lead stored in your tissues can be slowly causing irreversible damage. Damage occurs to individual cells, then to your body organs and eventually your entire body system. The exposure can damage the nervous system, kidneys, immune system, reproductive system, and possibly cause cancer.

### HOW YOU CAN PROTECT YOURSELF

Lead exposure can be maintained at acceptable levels if the following practices are followed: Use an exhaust ventilation system where provided. Use a respirator that will properly protect you. Keep the worksite clean. Use only a vacuum with a HEPA filter or wet cleaning methods when removing lead dust. Never use compressed air for cleaning. Eat, drink, or smoke in areas away from the worksite. Keep all lunch boxes and coffee cups away from the work area. Use protective clothing. Store street clothes separate from work clothes. Never wear contaminated clothing home.

### WARNING SIGNS

In areas where there is lead, signs must be posted in each work area where the permissible exposure level is exceeded. The signs must bear the legend:

**WARNING**  
LEAD WORK AREA  
POISON  
NO SMOKING  
NO EATING