United States Environmental Protection Agency

UPDATED SOIL LEAD GUIDANCE FOR CERCLA SITES AND RCRA CORRECTIVE ACTION FACILITIES

OFFICE OF LAND & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

What action did EPA take?

EPA lowered recommended screening levels and strengthened guidance for cleaning up lead-contaminated soil in areas where children live, learn, and play. As a result, EPA expects to investigate more residential properties for lead contamination and potential cleanup. The guidance applies to Superfund sites and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act corrective action facilities.

The guidance primarily recommends:

- **Lower Screening Levels:** At sites in the early stage of investigation, EPA now recommends investigating areas where the amount of lead in soil is 200 parts per million (ppm) or more. However, for remedial actions, if there are other sources of lead exposure, such as lead in air and water, EPA recommends screening at 100ppm. EPA previously recommended a screening level of 400ppm for all sites regardless of whether there are other sources of lead present.

Why?

Protecting children from lead exposure is one of EPA's top priorities. The science on lead has evolved to demonstrate that lead exposure is harmful to children's health at lower levels than we previously understood. Strengthening our guidance will help EPA site teams effectively:

- Assess the potential impacts to children from lead exposure at contaminated areas.
- Select the right combination of response actions to reduce lead exposure based on the specific circumstances of the area, including risk factors and community input.

What are screening levels and are they different from cleanup levels?

Screening levels are:

- Used in the early stages of investigation to identify areas that EPA may need to study further.
- Consistently applied to all contaminated areas being assessed by EPA.

Cleanup levels are:

- The levels at which EPA will take action to remediate (clean up) an area of each site.
- Developed after assessing the specific risks and other relevant information at the site.
- May change from site to site based on conditions specific to the area.

Screening levels are not cleanup levels. They are used when initially investigating a release to determine if the level of contamination is high enough to warrant further investigation. After further investigation, EPA makes cleanup decisions specific to each site, including setting cleanup levels, using site-specific factors such as risk factors, community input, and the level of lead that was already in the area (called the background level). This background level of lead could be the result of many sources, like natural geologic processes, lead from gasoline and paint, and other sources unrelated to a release of contamination from industrial or commercial operations. Superfund generally does not address the background level of lead.

What happens now?

EPA site teams will consider how the updated guidance impacts each residential lead site. They will generally take the following steps:

1. **Prioritize**: EPA will prioritize which sites and areas to assess first because we expect a significant number of properties may need to be evaluated, re-evaluated, and cleaned up. EPA prioritizes areas based on risks to people and the environment. To prioritize our risk reduction efforts, EPA generally will focus initial efforts in areas where children currently live and play and where EPA hasn't already conducted cleanup work.

2. **Evaluate**: To identify next steps, EPA will evaluate currently available information about existing Superfund sites. During this evaluation EPA will answer a few key questions:
    - Does the current cleanup plan, including the cleanup level, need to be updated to protect people and the environment?
    - If so, does EPA need to gather any additional information about the site or site risks to update the site-specific lead in soil cleanup level?
    - Does EPA need to investigate additional areas of the site to determine where additional work may be needed?

3. **Decide**: Once EPA has answered the evaluation-related questions, EPA will decide on next steps at each site and will follow the Superfund decision making process.
    - If major changes to a prior cleanup plan are needed, like updating a cleanup level or expanding the cleanup to new yards, EPA will open a public comment period and host public meetings to ask for community input on a new proposed plan to address lead contamination. After EPA considers all public comments, EPA will issue a formal decision (remedy, or cleanup plan) and notify the impacted community.

4. **Act**: EPA will implement, or require potentially responsible parties to implement, the selected actions, such as residential property cleanups, to reduce lead exposure risks from lead-contaminated soils. EPA's decision may also include additional actions such as lead health education, installing protective barriers, and other measures to maintain the remedy.

What does the update mean for people impacted by lead-contaminated sites?

Most importantly, people should be aware that ingesting soil with lead in it can be dangerous to our health, especially to children's health. Therefore, knowing if lead-contamination is in a family's soil is important; that way, people can take steps to reduce risks to protect their health and prevent lead poisoning. EPA recommends simple actions to help minimize your family's risk to lead in soil:

- Contact EPA about free lead testing of yards in potentially contaminated areas.
- Wash hands, especially children's, after handling soil, playing outside, and before meals.
- Make sure children eat nutritious meals high in iron and calcium.
- Have children, especially those under 7 tested for lead exposure annually.
- Wet mop and dust surfaces regularly; keep toys and play areas clean.
- Take shoes off at the door and keep your pets clean.
- Wear gloves while gardening.
- Clean your produce and peel root vegetables.

EPA site teams will communicate with residents affected by this guidance about the specific next steps the Agency will take in their community. As site teams are implementing this guidance, EPA may request access to a resident's property to test their soil or to clean up their yards at no cost to them.