



COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

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Burlington Lead Program (802) 865-LEAD

Salvage Component Facts

Reusing or recycling architectural components from old buildings is an excellent way to reduce the waste stream but you could also be bringing a source of lead into your home.

Why is there lead in salvaged components?

Prior to 1978, lead was used in paint and to a lesser degree in varnishes and other finishes.

Do all salvaged components contain lead?

No, but as a general rule, the older the component, the more likely it will contain lead.

How can I tell if a component might contain lead?

The only sure way to tell is to have a component tested. X-ray fluorescence (XRF) Analyzers can non-destructively determine lead content from coatings. These analyzers are fairly expensive and need to be used by properly trained and certified inspectors. Having a laboratory analyze a paint chip is another alternative that provides the most accurate results, but you have to send a chip to the lab and wait for the analysis results. Instant lead test chemical swabs are the cheapest and fastest way to determine whether lead is present, however the swab should be used in an area where all of the paint layers are exposed because it is not uncommon for the older lead paint to be covered by a newer nonlead paint layer. When in doubt assume there is lead.

Does stripping the paint off make the component safe?

Surprisingly, no. Chemical stripping especially will drive the lead into the pores of the wood. A component with no visible paint can still test several times higher than the threshold definition of lead based paint which is 1.0 milligram of lead per square centimeter.

Does repainting the component make it safe?

Generally, a repainted component is safer as long as the paint is kept intact. Components that experience friction with use like windows, doors, and drawers are more likely to release lead as the friction grinds the paint off.

What is the risk?

There have been several cases of children and workers being poisoned by lead from salvaged building components. Lead poisoning in children is especially dangerous because it can cause serious neurological and developmental problems. Children and adults with elevated blood lead levels frequently will exhibit no outward symptoms.

What should I do to be safe?

- Always assume salvaged components contain lead until testing can prove otherwise.
- Remember that while chemical stripping may remove the paint, a significant amount of lead can remain in the wood even if no paint is visible.
- Always use lead safe work practices that minimize the spread of dust and contamination. This means avoid cutting, sanding, grinding, burning, or any other activity that might create airborne dust.
- Keep children away from any component with visible paint deterioration, or if it has been chemically stripped.

For more information, contact the Burlington Lead Program at (802) 865-LEAD (5323).