

Report Says Fewer Rochester Children Have High Blood Lead Levels

Bud Lowell

ROCHESTER, NY (2008-12-10) Two years after the City of Rochester adopted a pioneering law against lead poisoning, the number of city children testing with high levels of lead in their bloodstreams has dropped by more than half.

The Center for Governmental Research has issued a report covering the first two years of the law. CGR Project Director Maria Ayoob says more than 28,000 rental properties have been inspected since the law took effect in 2006. She says about 12 percent of the rental housing units inspected by the city, or 3,440 units, turned out to have lead hazards. All of those apartments have been made lead safe or are being fixed.

Ayoob says the study found that 604 children in Rochester tested with elevated lead levels in 2005. By this year, that number dropped by more than half to 284.

Ayoob spoke at a house on Central Park which was made lead safe under the law. Owner Chad Terussa says the house required extensive work including about \$6,000 worth of new windows and drywall work. Terussa and his wife self-funded the repair work on this and more than a dozen other houses they own in Rochester because they didn't want to wait for the city's grant approval process.

The CGR report says the average amount spent on repairs by landlords was about \$2,600.

The occupant of an apartment in the building, Channel Ellis, says the controversy over lead dust caught her attention and caused her to put lead safety right next to cost on her list of priorities in searching for a place to live. Ellis has three small children and says they put everything in their mouths, so lead dust ingestion was a serious concern for her.

Rochester's law targets lead dust in older housing units. It mostly comes from worn lead-based paint, which was banned in 1978. Young children are particularly vulnerable to ingesting lead. Elevated levels can cause decreased IQ, higher likelihood of behavioral problems and higher school dropout rates.

The city law requires that units built before 1978 have either a visual inspection to check for lead hazards, or a dust wipe test in areas known to have large numbers of children with lead poisoning.

The study says the average cost of fixing each violation was about 150 dollars. Some properties had multiple violations. The city offered landlords a 100 dollar credit per violation during the first two years of the law to help cover their repair bills.

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