

PRESS RELEASE

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Report Released on Initial 2 Years of Rochester NY Lead Law

Nearly 3,440 Housing Units Being Made Lead Safe, Number of Children under Age 6 with Lead Poisoning Is Down

Rochester, NY—December 10, 2008 — A report on the impact of the first two years of Rochester's "Lead Based Paint Poisoning Prevention" law was released today by the Center for Governmental Research (CGR).

The study was undertaken to assess the impact of the law, monitor the number of children with lead poisoning, and identify other consequences, including landlord costs. The report covers the two-year period that ended June 30, 2008.

"Nearly 3,440 housing units – about 12 of every 100 rental housing units inspected by the city during the two years – failed either a visual or dust wipe test for interior lead hazards. All have been or soon should be made lead safe as a result of the law," said Maria Ayoob, CGR project director. "In addition, of Rochester children under age six tested for lead poisoning, the number with elevated blood lead levels (EBLs) dropped from 604 in 2004-05, to 403 during year one of the law, and to 284 in year two."

"The odds that a child with an elevated blood lead level lived in rental housing decreased sharply in the two years after the law went into effect," added Rebecca Morley, executive director of the National Center for Healthy Housing, a partner in the CGR study.

The study was funded with a \$108,000 grant from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation.

The Rochester Lead Law

Children with lead poisoning face serious problems such as decreased IQ levels; higher likelihood of learning disabilities, behavioral problems and/or juvenile delinquency; and higher high school dropout rates. Rochester's law targets a major lead source – lead in paint, dust and soil often associated with older rental housing. The law requires inspections that go beyond looking for peeling paint, which makes the approach novel and of interest to cities nationwide.

Rochester's law applies to rental properties built prior to 1978. All housing units inspected by the city must undergo visual inspection for deteriorated paint. In addition, dust wipe tests are required if the housing units are located in areas that have concentrated numbers of children with EBLs. Dust wipe testing can detect lead paint hazards that are not visible to the naked eye.

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Key Findings: 2006-2008

Interior Visual Inspections

- During the two years, 28,000 rental housing units were inspected by the city for interior lead hazards.
- 2,338 rental housing units failed visual inspections for interior hazards (i.e., inspectors found visible deteriorated paint on interior surfaces).
- 37% of the units that passed the inspections were located in high risk areas of the city (i.e., older rental housing) and were referred for dust wipes.
- 1,100 units that had initially passed the visual inspections subsequently failed dust wipe tests. “Without dust wipe testing nearly a third of all units ultimately found to have interior lead hazards would have been missed,” said study partner Katrina Korfmacher Ph.D. of the Environmental Health Sciences Center at the University of Rochester Medical Center.
- In total, 3,438 housing units (12% of all units inspected) have been, or soon should be, made lead safe as a result of the ordinance.

Blood Lead Levels

- In the two years prior to the law, nearly 1,100 of about 14,700 city children under age six who were tested (7.5%) had elevated blood lead levels. In the two years after the law took effect, the equivalent numbers were 700 out of 13,700 (5%).
- The drop in the number of children with EBLs from 604 (in 2004-05) to 284 (in 2007-08) was a 53% decrease – continuing a county-wide downward trend.
- Between years one and two of the law, the number of EBLs decreased nearly 30%, compared with a 19% decrease from 2004-05 to 2005-06.

Landlords

The findings below are based on 200 responses to a survey of landlords who had two-family housing units inspected in year one:

- One-third of respondents did not spend any money on repairs in preparing for or responding to an inspection, 37% spent between \$1 and \$1,000, and the remaining 30% spent more than \$1,000, with window replacements contributing to higher costs for some landlords.

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- Of those respondents who reported spending money on repairs, the average amount was \$2,618, and the median cost about \$950. Less than half of these landlords replaced windows; more than three-quarters repaired or painted windows.
- A majority of respondents reported doing their own lead repair work, which prompted the study team, Ayoub said, “to recommend the city continue its efforts to educate and train workers so they don’t inadvertently create new hazards.”

Costs

- The average cost of clearing a single violation (more than one violation can be cited) was about \$150. During the study period, landlords could apply for a \$100 grant to help defray this cost.
- The City of Rochester incurred an average annual cost of about \$600,000 in lead-law related expenses (e.g., cost of additional inspectors, dust wipe tests, clearance reimbursements to landlords).
- During the study period, Monroe County received a State grant of about \$246,000, and in turn contracted with the City for services, which helped defray some costs.

Study Recommendations

The CGR study team made numerous recommendations to further strengthen the law. In particular, the city should continue to monitor inspection data; child blood lead screening results; and consequences of the law for families, neighborhoods and property owners.

See www.cgr.org for the full report.

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