

IMMIGRANT WORKERS AND CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO TAKE- HOME LEAD

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Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety
and Health (MassCOSH)



- Non profit membership coalition organizing and advocating for safe, healthy working conditions since 1976
- www.masscosh.org
- Immigrant Worker Center formed in 2006 to use OSH strategies in organizing most vulnerable workers



MassCOSH

| Standing Together for Safe and Healthy Work

THE HOME REPAIR/PAINTING INDUSTRY AND ITS LABOR FORCE

- Small size of employers
 - Lack of knowledge of, and ability & desire to comply with, regulations
 - Many immigrants
 - language barrier
 - lack of knowledge of rights
 - fear of retaliation
 - threat of deportation

PAINTERS' BLOOD LEADS

MASSACHUSETTS OCCUPATIONAL LEAD REGISTRY

=> 25 mcg/dl (2001 – 2007)

- Painters 306 (37%)
 - Others 524 (63%)
 - Total 830 (100%)
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- House painters, 2013: 37% of BLL => 15 µg/dl

BLL SCREENING OF BRAZILIAN PAINTERS (N=61)

BLL ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$)	Freq.	%
< 10	39	64
10 – 14	7	12
15 – 24	5	8
25 – 39	5	8
≥ 40	5	8

Adapted from: COBWEB, “A Report on Brazilian Immigrant Workers
in Massachusetts,” 2009

HAZARDS OTHER THAN LEAD

Electrical

Power lines

Tools, cords

Falls

Ladders

Scaffolds

Falling objects

Demolition

Siding, roofing

HAZARDS OTHER THAN LEAD

- Heat

- Temp labor

No training

No awareness/compliance with RRP

Wage theft

Seriously???



This is the kind of thing we see at OSHA from time to time.

This is the kind of thing we see on
LEAD-BASED Paint inspections from
time-to-time.



Case Study #1

LEAD-POISONED IMMIGRANT HOUSE PAINTERS

- 2 brothers, house painters from Central America
- 1 brother complaining of stomach pain, other ailments
- After several days of complaining to contractor, contractor drove worker to hospital ER
 - Told worker not to reveal work-relatedness
 - Threatened worker with contacting INS
 - Fired worker

Case Study (cont'd)

LEAD-POISONED IMMIGRANT HOUSE PAINTERS

- Blood lead: $> 90 \mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$
- Contacted OSHA, with help of Lead Registry
 - Contractor fined
 - Contractor paid worker for lost work time
- 2nd brother continued working, with symptoms; didn't complain

CASE STUDIES

Case #2 – Home renovation

- No RRP license
- Sanding floors, replacing siding, installing insulation
- No personal protective clothing/equipment
- Not paid wages (\$1400)

CASE STUDIES

Case #3 – Electrical work and plumbing

- No RRP license
- No electrician license
- No health and safety training
- Not paid wages (\$240)

TAKE-HOME CASE STUDY #1

- 6-year-old child
- Blood lead – 31 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$ (v)
- Home: modern, single-family, suburbs
- Father: contractor

“TAKE-HOME” CASE STUDY #2

(MMWR August 21, 2009)

- 6 children, ages 4 – 28 months
- Blood leads 15 – 32 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$ (median: 21 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$)
- Homes – no lead paint
- Parents’ occupations – painting, paint removal, metal recycling
- Car seats (5 cars): 49 – 2100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$ (median: 550 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$)
- Safety seats (6): 43 – 420 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$ (median: 98 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$)

“ELEVATED BLOOD LEAD LEVELS IN CHILDREN OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS”

(Am J Public Health, August 1997)

- Children of construction workers < 6 yrs. old (31): **BLL 7.4 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$** (mean)
- Children (controls) < 6 yrs. Old (19): **BLL 5.1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$** (mean)
- Dust lead higher in construction worker homes and cars