

New Lead Paint Rule not a fix, NAHB says

WASHINGTON, Dec. 29-The Environmental Protection Agency's newly proposed rule governing lead-based paint in the remodeling industry does not allay the serious health problem it was designed to help prevent: lead poisoning in young children.

Instead, the new rule will add delays to renovation projects and cost home owners more, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). EPA announced the new requirements Dec. 29.

"There is no scientific research that shows that remodeling causes lead poisoning in children," said Dave Wilson, NAHB president and a custom home builder from Ketchum, Idaho. "Federal efforts should focus on finding the sources of lead exposure -- commonly tap water, peeling paint or contaminated soil or dust -- and developing ways to mitigate that exposure. Instead, this rule concentrates on expensive restrictions that only affect the cost of remodeling."

The new EPA rule, which applies to contractors working in homes built before 1978, changes practices regarding training, licensing and insurance, the costs of which will ultimately be passed on to the home owner. Liability issues mean that fewer firms are likely to continue working in pre-1978 homes, thus limiting the availability of certified renovators to homeowners and driving costs even higher.

"We know that 90 percent of the homes built between 1960 and 1978 do not contain lead paint and that more than half the typical renovation and remodeling work is done by the homeowner, whom EPA does not regulate," Wilson said. "Forcing all remodeling firms to comply with onerous new rules even when there is a low likelihood of exposure is a waste of money and time that would be better spent on targeted prevention and eradication efforts," he said.

"The EPA is headed in the wrong direction with this rule. Remodelers are very aware of how important it is to reduce our clients' and our employees' exposure to dust from lead-based paint. We continue to support and encourage education for consumers and for the industry. That is why we worked with EPA on a set of voluntary lead-safe work practices," he continued.

"The money spent on implementing the EPA rule might be better spent to help low-income households reduce their exposure to old lead-based paint, much like Department of Energy grants for low-income homeowners to buy energy-efficient windows and other weatherization features," Wilson suggested.