

FastFacts

About Safety First

by Mariangela Pfister

“Safety First!” Safety is important in any job. It begins with an understanding of the equipment and materials being used as well as an understanding of the safety issues inherent in all projects.

What Are the Hazards in a Project?

Materials you are working with can be hazardous, including products you are using and existing building features. For example, lead was used in paints into the 1970s and mercury was used until the early 1990s. Asbestos can be found in anything from old-pipe insulation, to roofing, to ceiling and floor tiles. Don't assume a material is safe. If you think something may be hazardous, have it professionally tested. Don't panic though, there's no reason to be alarmed by asbestos, lead or mercury unless the material is flaking, powdering, vaporizing from heat or otherwise damaged. You can release more hazardous materials by removing them in the name of safety when they are in sound condition than if you leave them alone. Also, plan your project's scope, procedures and costs carefully so that you do not begin work that you cannot finish.



Careful use of an extension ladder

How can you protect yourself when working on your inside or outside project?

Make sure any ladder you use is an appropriate one for your size and is tall enough for your job. Never over-reach on a ladder. Wear appropriate safety gear, which may include gloves, goggles, ear protection and a respirator approved for the product/materials with which you'll be working. Wear a long-



Unsound paint



Sound paint

sleeved shirt and pants to keep dust off your skin. Keep a first-aid kit handy. Seal off work areas and place plastic over your window screens to contain all dust. Turn off your air-circulating systems to keep dust from being carried throughout your building.

Be especially cautious when using devices that produce heat to prevent fires and to avoid vaporizing hazardous materials such as lead. Never have food or drink in the same area where you are working. Take breaks often and pay attention to how you're

feeling. Tell someone where you'll be working, so they can check on you occasionally. Do not allow vulnerable individuals, such as the infirm, pregnant or nursing women, or children in the work area.

Once you finish a job, remove your contaminated clothing immediately and shower. Wash these clothes twice and keep them separate from the rest of your laundry until they are clean. Take refuse to a hazardous-waste disposal site. If you hire people to do the work, insist that they also consider these safety steps and are licensed, insured and bonded.

Read all instructions and materials safety data sheets before using any product or equipment, and follow the instructions carefully. Use chemicals sparingly and never combine cleaning or other products.



Safety gear

As part of your general cleaning routine, wet dust/mop, especially at any friction surfaces (such as windows and doors). This will help pick up dust that may contain lead. Keep your property well maintained so materials remain in good shape. If it is determined that hazardous materials must be removed, hire a reputable, licensed abatement specialist and understand their methods for protecting you and your environment while they're doing the job.

Keeping yourself and your surroundings safe with any job you do is the first step to a successful preservation project!

For more information on lead and mercury safety, visit epa.gov.

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