



Objective

Ensure the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) issues draft rules to update the occupational lead standards that protect workers and their families from lead poisoning.

No level of lead exposure is safe

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is no safe level of lead exposure.

The occupational lead standards are 45 years old

Washington state's current standards are based on our scientific knowledge about lead toxicity from the 1970s. We now know that lead levels that were previously considered acceptable are not safe.

The state's rules have not been updated to match today's science.

Existing Federal and state laws do not adequately protect workers from lead poisoning

Workers can legally be exposed to dangerous levels of lead that are associated with serious health effects, like cardiovascular disease, infertility, and miscarriage.

Women exposed to lead in their workplaces can also expose their unborn children to lead, resulting in birth defects.

Workers can also inadvertently bring lead dust into their homes from work – on their clothes, boots, tools, and shoes – exposing their families and posing a special risk to children in the home.

Lead poisoning disproportionately impacts workers of color and immigrants

In King County, workers of color are more likely to experience lead poisoning – both in general industry and the construction trades.

A recent analysis of lead poisoning data for adult residents of King County showed that most cases are associated with work in battery manufacturing,

bridge painting, and gun ranges. Hispanic and Asian workers are at particular risk.

L&I is currently updating the lead standards

In 2012, Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) petitioned Governor Inslee and L&I to update our outdated occupational lead standards (WAC 296-62-07521 and WAC 296-155-176).

L&I has convened a series of stakeholder meetings to gather recommendations and has opened rulemaking by filing a CR101. We expect L&I to release its draft updated lead rules in 2017.

PHSKC is working to ensure the state's lead rules are based on the best available science and data

We have developed a series of recommendations to ensure that workers maintain their blood lead levels below 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter of whole blood.

PHSKC is recommending: 1) reductions in the concentrations of lead in air that trigger regulatory action (i.e., the action level and permissible exposure limit), 2) lowering the blood lead level that prompts medical removal from work, 3) enhanced medical monitoring for lead-related health problems, and 4) other improvements to protective clothing, hygiene practices, training, and education.

Upcoming opportunity for public involvement

L&I is holding its next stakeholder meeting at 9 am on October 25th at L&I's Tukwila location: 12806 Gateway Drive South, Tukwila, WA 98168.

More information about PHSKC's recommendations and L&I's stakeholder process is available at https://www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/search-by-topic?index=Safety_Topics&query=lead

For additional information, please contact:

Steve Whittaker, Ph.D., Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County, Public Health -- Seattle & King County, steve.whittaker@kingcounty.gov, 206-263-8499