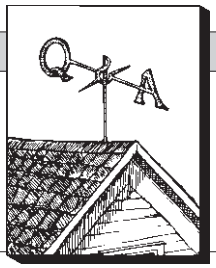
Coping With Lead Paint



by Hank Spies

Q. *Is there a safe and efficient way to remove lead-based paint (LBP) from the woodwork in an older home? Can it be safely sealed in place?*

A. There is no way to safely seal surfaces covered with lead-based paint because there is virtually no way to keep it from chipping. LBP on walls can be covered with drywall, but it would be difficult to cover woodwork. If tests show more than one milligram of lead per cubic centimeter of paint, HUD rules require abatement in HUD-assisted housing, and abatement should be considered in all housing because of liability problems.

Removal by machine-sanding or heating with propane or gasoline torches is prohibited. Scraping, heat treatment, or chemical removers (except methylene chloride) are permitted. Burning, sanding, or scraping LBP can produce a very fine lead dust, which sticks to any surface and also contaminates household dust. Some local requirements include cleaning the stripped surface with a HEPA vacuum cleaner, and then washing, revacuuming, and repainting. Wood floors should be stripped, washed, sealed, vacuumed, and washed again. For more information, contact the National Institute of Building Sciences, 1015 15th St., Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005; 202/347-5710.

If you wish to test for lead paint yourself, a chemical test kit, "The Lead Detective," is available for $59.95 plus $3.50 shipping, from Professional Inspection Equipment, 153 Plainview Road, Woodbury, NY 11797; 800/334-9291. The kit will make about 50 tests, and has a shelf life of about 6 weeks.

Cement-Board Bonding

Q. Which side of Durock should face out, the smooth or rough side, for ceramic tile in a shower or bath enclosure? I feel the rough side gives better adhesion.

A. It does not make a lot of difference, but the generally preferred usage is smooth side out (to the back of the tile). The rough side is for better adhesion when the entire board must be mortared down, such as under floor tile or when sticking it to a concrete block wall.

Baffled Over Ceiling Vents

Q. Is there any reason to run insulation baffles all the way up a cathedral ceiling, or should they just be used near the eaves? The ones I use only ventilate 7 inches of the 141/2-inch space between rafters. Is this sufficient?

A. There is no need for air chutes to run the length of the rafters if there is adequate room (2 inches) for air circulation between the insulation and the sheathing. They are frequently installed full-length to be sure the insulation is not pushed up against the sheathing, cutting off air flow. However, the most important factor is an unbroken ceiling surface. If there are significant penetrations through the ceiling, even good ventilation may not be adequate to prevent problems.

Preventing Clapboard Cupping

Q. With pine clapboards, would it be a good idea to first apply Thompson's Water Seal, then an oil stain before installation? I am concerned about preventing problems with swelling, shrinking, and cupping.

A. Thompson's Water Seal is basically a water repellent and contains no preservatives. I would suggest dipping the boards in oil stain, which will seal the back and ends. A dipping box and drain rack are fairly easy to build from wood, using a polyethylene liner. If stainless-steel nails are used, there should be no need to stain the siding after it is on the house. If the siding is to be installed over a foil-faced insulation, adding a layer of 15-pound felt between the sheathing and siding seems to reduce the cupping and warping problem.

Flat-Site Drainage

Q. What is the correct way to build a drywell for a sump-pump outlet on a flat site?

A. The size and depth of the hole should be adjusted according to the anticipated quantity and rate of flow of the water and with the percolation rate of the soil. In some areas, a drywell will not work at all because of a poor perc rate. In others, drywells work well. After size and depth are determined, the hole should be lined with filter fabric, then filled with washed coarse rock (4 to 6 inches seems to work well). The filter fabric will prevent the soil from washing in and filling the spaces between the rocks. (See article on geotextiles in the next issue.) The rock should extend to the ground surface over at least a part of the drywell, to allow the water to overflow onto the lawn if the volume is too great for percolation. If the drywell is inadequate, it can fill, holding water in the sump-pump discharge pipe and making it subject to freezing. ■

Henry Spies is with the Small Homes Council-Building Research Council of the University of Illinois. Questions for this column should be sent to him at Journal of Light Construction, P.O. Box 5059, Burlington, VT 05402.