

Environmental Issues

Home inspectors who primarily focus on structural integrity and working systems might not be qualified to conduct specialized inspections for radon, asbestos and lead paint — substances that in recent years have emerged as the most common environmental concerns for home buyers. Testing for these substances typically requires a specialist who will charge a fee beyond the basic cost of a general home inspection.

As with any other inspection issue, the estimated expense of remedying a toxic substance situation may have already been factored into the home's listing price. Other times, the outcome of an inspection might become a negotiating point.

A Few Quick Facts on Radon

- Radon is a tasteless, odorless gas.
- It is a proven carcinogen and ranks second only to cigarette smoking as a cause of lung cancer.
- If you have a radon problem, it is usually easy and inexpensive to abate.
- There are a number of radon sampling devices that you can buy, or you can have a professional company conduct tests.
- Radon is measured in pico Curies per liter (pCi/L). The EPA recommends that remedial action be taken when a residence exceeds a radon level of four pCi/L.

Asbestos

- Many older homes have asbestos insulation in walls and ceilings, wrapped around hot water pipes or in exterior shingles.
- Is it dangerous?
If you suspect there may be asbestos in your home, you should have a professional inspection. Generally, asbestos is considered a health hazard when the material is *friable*, that is, when it crumbles, releasing tiny fibers into the air.
- Removal of asbestos can be an expensive process and must be conducted by trained and certified professionals. But the presence of asbestos may not be a health hazard, and in some cases, an asbestos hazard can be isolated without removal.

Lead-Based Paint

Approximately three-quarters of the housing in the United States built before 1978 (about 64 million dwellings) contain lead-based paint. When properly maintained and managed, this paint possesses little risk. However, 1.7 million children have blood-lead levels above safe limits, mostly due to exposure to lead-based paint hazards at home.

- **Affects Brain** — Lead poisoning can cause permanent damage to the brain and create reduced intelligence and behavioral problems. Lead also can damage other organs and can cause abnormal fetal development in pregnant women. People can get lead in their bodies by breathing or swallowing lead dust, or by eating soil or paint chips with lead in them.

- **Often Found in Pre-1978 Housing** —

The Residential Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction ACT of 1992 directs the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure people receive information needed to protect themselves from lead-based paint hazards.

- **New Rule this Fall** —

Most home buyers and renters must receive information on lead-based paint and lead-based paint hazards when they buy or rent housing built before 1978. Some housing, such as efficiency apartments, dormitories, vacation rentals, adult housing and foreclosure sales are not covered. Under the rule, sellers, landlords, and their agents will be responsible for providing information to buyers or renters before a sale or lease. Home buyers will have 10 days to conduct a lead-based paint inspection or risk assessment at their own expense. The rule gives the two parties flexibility to negotiate key terms of the evaluation. The new rule does not require any testing or removal of lead-based paint by sellers or landlords and does not invalidate leasing and sales contracts.

- **Pamphlet Available** — For a copy of the Environmental Protection Agency pamphlet, *Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home*, sample disclosure forms, or the rule itself, call the [National Lead Information Clearinghouse](#) (NLIC) at (800) 424-5323, or TDD (800) 526-5456 for the hearing impaired. You may also send your request by fax to (202) 659-1192 or by e-mail to

ehc@nsc.org. The [EPA pamphlet and rule](#) also are available electronically and may be accessed through the Internet.