

Lead-safe renovation — what homeowners need to know

Renovating your home can be daunting. The last thing you want to worry about is the possible lead-related health risk of some common renovation tasks. Sanding, demolition and siding and window replacement can all disturb lead-based paint, placing you and your family at risk of lead poisoning.

Because of these risks, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed the Lead-Based Paint Renovation, Repair and Painting Program to help protect homeowners. As of April 22, the legislation requires that workers, including contractors, painters and maintenance personnel, be trained to use lead-safe work practices.

Additionally, renovation firms must be EPA-certified.

Because these common remodeling practices can be dangerous to a family's health, it's important for you to learn

about a contractor's lead-safe practices before delving into such projects.

"While this legislation does not directly apply to product manufacturers, it has proved to be a challenge for the industry as a whole," says Rich Black, a replacement channel specialist with Ply Gem, a leading manufacturer of home remodeling and building products. "So manufacturers like Ply Gem have taken a lead on this initiative and are working with customers to organize EPA certification-training programs so that they, in turn, can provide clarification and peace of mind to homeowners."

What does the legislation entail?

Under the EPA, the legislation:

- * Applies to all remodeling/renovation projects on homes, childcare facilities and schools built before 1978 that contain lead paint.

- * Is related to on-site work practices.

- * Renovation workers must take an eight-hour training course to become certified on lead-safe practices.

Exemptions include:

- * Housing built in 1978 or after. If you are not sure what year your home was built and whether or not it contains lead-based paint, it is the contractor's responsibility to confirm that information.

- * Housing for the elderly or disabled, unless a child under the age of 6 lives or is planning to live in the home.

- * Homes with no bedrooms, including studio apartments and dormitories.

- * Homes declared lead-free by a certified inspector or risk assessor.

- * Minor repair work using 6 square feet or less of paint per room inside, or 20 square feet or less of exterior space.

Questions all homeowners should ask

When meeting with a home improvement company or renovation firm, the representative should bring up the issue and provide a government-issued certificate from the EPA showing that their firm has installers who are certified in lead-safe renovation practices. If they do not provide this documentation, homeowners should question if the company is certified.

Also, beware that this legislation may increase the cost of some renovation projects, so homeowners should be careful not to fall for a lower bid from a non-certified contractor.

What the EPA-certification entails

"Before hiring a contractor or renovation firm, it's important to understand the basics of the legislation and what you should expect from your home improvement company," says

Keith Pignes, chief marketing officer of Ply Gem.

By law, at least one certified installer needs to be on the job site, with a valid certificate, if it was built before 1978 and contains lead-based paint. To become certified, the contractor must attend an eight-hour course that includes education on the dangers of lead-based paint, hands-on learning of safe demolition, installation and disposal of the debris, as well as a final examination. Those who have taken the course can then provide on-the-job training to his or her helpers, who must also be able to provide a certificate to the homeowner.

For more information on the Lead-Based Paint Renovation, Repair and Painting Program, visit www.epa.gov/lead. For more information on renovating your home with Ply Gem products, visit www.plygem.com.

Courtesy of ARAcontent

For some, tiny houses are just the right size

By Steve Campbell
MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

FORT WORTH, Texas — They had the land and the plan ready for a 3,000-square-foot retirement home.

But sticker shock and a sour economy spurred Lee and Donna McCollough to downsize their dream into a 336-square-foot "country cabin."

"It was mostly an economic move. But it's serving our lifestyle very well," said Lee McCollough of their home near Schulenburg in South Texas.

Built from vintage salvage materials by Tiny Texas Houses of Luling, McCollough said the "turnkey package" cost \$70,000. "It's great," said the 62-year-old retired electrical technician. "People are impressed with the construction and coziness of it. It's built like an Igloo ice chest."

Tiny home proponents call it "super downsizing," but that's just the extreme edge of a growing movement away from suburban castles and into "right-sized" homes that require less energy, upkeep and money, experts say.

"The era of the 'McMansion' could well be over as home sizes have been trending down-

ward recently, with a significantly higher number of architects reporting demand for smaller homes this year," Kermit Baker, chief economist for the American Institute of Architects, said in a news release.

In a June survey by the National Association of Home Builders, 59 percent of respondents said they are building smaller homes, said Stephen Melman, the group's director of economic services.

As the economy sank in 2008, new homes started shrinking, Melman said. Census data showed the average new home declined from 2,600 square feet in the second quarter of 2008 to 2,373 square feet in the third quarter, he said.

"This isn't the worst thing in the world," Melman said. "People are buying the home they need. ... Energy costs are up and people are interested in cutting costs."

Brad Kittel of Tiny Texas Houses is addressing those needs.

In 2006, he started the company to use materials from his salvage business. Using wood from old homes and barns, he built a 160-square-foot cottage to make a point.

"I wanted people to understand that salvage antiques aren't just for decoration. Once I built the first one, everybody liked it. It got a better response than I thought it would," said Kittel, 53.

"I figured a 12-by-20-foot would be the biggest when I started, and now we are all the way up to a 12-by-33," he said. "That might be too big."

One couple is considering a frontier-style "dog trot" cabin that combines two small boxes with an open breezeway under a shared roof, he said.

Kittel's homes, which are built in Luling and trucked to home sites, drew initial interest as artists studios and weekend retreats.

Now, the economy has people viewing them as full-time dwellings. Kittel has built about 30 of the petite abodes, and six more are in the works. They range in price from \$38,000 to \$90,000.

Kay Love was the first to call one home. Love, 62, who owns a cattle company, has a 1,300-square-foot home in Austwell, Texas, but she wanted a second place near her family in Stockdale. Now she lives half the time in a 300-square-foot "Victorianish" home.

"I planned to build a big house and then decided I didn't need a big house," she said. "I am real happy with it. I'm not environmentally correct, it just works for me. I had lived on a boat, so small things don't really bother me. The house is comfortable; it sits in a pasture on the top of a hill with a nice view. It just fits."

Kittel's not the only builder squeezing into this tiny niche.

Jay Shafer, who has lived in a 100-square-foot home since 1999, has become a Pied Piper of the micro movement.

Four years ago, the 44-year-old former art teacher and health food store clerk started Tumbleweed Tiny House Co. in Graton, Calif., which sells plans for small homes and builds tiny portable ones on wheels. He's written *The Small House Book* and teaches courses on building small.

Interest in his homes is driven in equal measure by the economy and the environment, Shafer said. His home plans start at \$995 and the houses on wheels run from \$35,000 to \$60,000.

For such Spartan spaces, those prices sound steep but Shafer says building small is akin to "tailoring a suit."

Kittel says it's like "boat building considering the time and effort it takes." The small houses take four to six months to build, he said. "It's more labor-intensive because you are not using a 4-by-8-foot sheet of Sheetrock to cover the wall. Our cabinets are built into the house the old-fashioned way."

And it's not just small operators tapping into downsizing.

Lowe's, the big-box home improvement retailer, sells kits and plans for Katrina Cottages, first designed as alternatives to the Federal Emergency Management Administration's trailers.

"The program continues to draw interest from a variety of customers across the United States," spokeswoman Maureen Rich wrote in an e-mail.

Minuscule homes aren't for the material minded.

"A guy came in and was talking about downsizing and he said what I'm doing is super downsizing," Kittel said. "And admittedly, for most people it is that. If you are coming out of a conventional lifestyle with a 2,000-square-foot house and two people and you are moving into one of my houses, you are super downsizing."