

ALLIANCE ALERT

A MONTHLY ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER BY THE ALLIANCE FOR HEALTHY HOMES

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Give to the Alliance and Help Secure Healthy Housing in Your Community

For nearly 20 years, the Alliance for Healthy Homes has worked to protect children and families from dangerous conditions in housing. We have pushed the Federal government to require lead-safe work practices during renovation work, assisted community-based organizations to demand protective state and local policies, and have helped force health considerations into building codes used by hundreds of localities.

However, we cannot continue our critical work without your support.

While we are fortunate to have dedicated grants for our larger projects, we rely on donations from individuals like you to fund our critical policy work. Without your support, we are unable to take the message of safe, affordable and healthy housing to Congress and key decision makers in DC and beyond.

Won't you please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Alliance for Healthy Homes during this Holiday season? For a quick and easy donation by credit card, please visit our website at http://www.afhh.org/misc/misc_contrib.htm. You may also send a check, payable to Alliance for Healthy Homes, to 50 F St., NW, Suite 300, Washington DC 20001.

Finally, if you are able, please designate the Alliance in your donation to the Combined Federal Campaign, which allows employees of the Federal government to donate to nonprofit charities through automatic payroll contributions. The Alliance's Combined Federal Campaign identification number is 10367. Many thanks to all who contribute!

International Code Council Committee Accepts Proposals from the Alliance and NCHH

A committee of the International Code Council (ICC) considered a series of proposals from the Alliance for Healthy Homes and the National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) to improve the 2012 version of the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC). The IPMC applies to all structures, but as a practical matter it is the nation's model housing code governing conditions in and around the structure that affect occupants. Several states and nearly 600 localities across the country have adopted the IPMC for housing. The committee's decisions go for public comment this spring and a final vote by code officials in Charlotte, NC from October 28 to November 1, 2010.

The Alliance and NCHH are delighted to announce that the committee accepted three of our proposals:



- Require use of the lead-safe work practices to repair deteriorated paint on structures built before 1978. The LSWPs are those defined in EPA’s renovation, repair and painting rule. Paint is presumed to be lead-based paint unless testing shows otherwise.
- Require carbon monoxide alarms in dwelling units with combustion sources or an attached garage. There are exemptions for homes with ventilated or open attached garages.
- Prohibit the use of portable unvented fuel-burning space heaters to provide comfort heating.

Another ICC committee accepted our proposal to adopt California’s strict standards for formaldehyde from composite wood products.

ICC committees gave serious consideration to other proposals but did not approve them. However, the Alliance and NCHH anticipate submitting public comments to address committee concerns about these other proposals and will pursue approval by the ICC code officials next year. These proposals include:

- Requiring radon-resistant new construction in high risk areas (counties designated Zone 1 and Zone 2 by EPA).
- Requiring removal, replacement or remediation of interior porous or water permeable surfaces that have visible mold.
- Defining “sanitary” so that code inspectors can more effectively apply this term that is used throughout the IPMC, and modifying the definition of “infestation.”
- Requiring use of a licensed pest management professional when a code official orders pest control.
- Establishing clear provisions in the IPMC for standards to address a variety of specific health issues.

In a related safety issue, the committee responsible for the International Residential Code affirmed the ICC membership’s decision to require sprinklers in one- and two-family housing.

As with any success, this work was done by a team. Special thanks to our colleagues Marc Nard; Wayne Jewell of Southfield, MI; Warren Friedman of HUD; Angela Mickalide of the Home Safety Council; Howard Asch of Michigan; Tom Mahar of New York; Doreen Cantor Pastor and Phil Jalbert of EPA; Tom Julia; Madeleine Shea and Meghan Butasek of Baltimore; Ruth Ann Norton and Wes Stewart of The Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning; Gloria Linnertz of Cancer Survivors Against Radon; Peter Hendrick, Julie Somis, and Dave Kapturowski of the American Association of Radon Scientists and Technologists; and Mike Pyles of Pennsylvania’s Department of Environmental Protection.

For more information, contact tneltner@nchh.info or jmalone@afhh.org.

Healthy Housing Advocates Respond to EPA Proposed Changes to RRP

As discussed in [last month’s Alert](#), EPA has proposed a number of changes to the lead-safe remodeling, repair and painting (RRP) rule, pursuant to a settlement agreement with public interest petitioners. Key among these changes was a proposal to eliminate the owner-occupied opt-out provision, and a requirement for the Renovator to provide additional notifications to owners and occupants following the completion of a job. The Alliance strongly supported the EPA in making these changes.

In cooperation with the National Center for Healthy Housing and the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, the Alliance submitted joint comments to the US EPA supporting their proposal as written and encouraging the EPA to reject a number of weaker alternatives. The comments provide legal and practical reasons for EPA to move forward with the proposed rule. Additionally, the Alliance and NCHH supported EPA's efforts to reduce the number of EPA-accredited lead training hours required to be a principal instructor under the rule. [A full copy of the submitted comments](#) is available on our website.

To encourage additional comments in favor the proposal, the three organizations hosted a conference call on November 20 to share a draft version of the joint comments, discuss the proposal and answer questions. EPA is accepting comments through November 27.

In other RRP news, EPA has posted a database of [frequently asked questions](#) about the RRP rule to their website. Although the seventeen questions listed by the EPA don't include much new information, there is an option to submit additional questions for EPA to consider. With help from Alert readers asking good questions, this has the potential to be a great resource.

Healthy People 2020 Seeks Public Input

Every 10 years, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) leverages scientific insights and lessons learned from the past decade, along with new knowledge of current data, trends, and innovations. Healthy People 2020 will reflect assessments of major risks to health and wellness, changing public health priorities, and emerging issues related to our nation's health preparedness and prevention.

Public participation is shaping Healthy People 2020, its purpose, goals, organization, and action plans. HHS is seeking input from communities and stakeholders through public meetings across the country and public comment periods. As a national initiative, Healthy People's success depends on a coordinated commitment to improve the health of the nation. [Comments are being accepted](#) regarding draft objectives for Healthy People 2020 until December 31, 2010. The overall idea is to track US progress on health using objective and measurable indicators for which data is already collected.

Many Healthy People 2020 objectives merit attention, but those noted below are of particular interest as they pertain to healthy homes (homes with physical problems, lead hazards, and radon mitigation/reduction; frequency of EBLLs, allergens, and pesticide-induced illness):

Objectives Retained "As Is" From Healthy People 2010

- EH HP2020-3: Reduce pesticide exposures that result in visits to a health care facility.
- EH HP2020-5: Reduce the proportion of occupied housing units that have moderate or severe physical problems.

Objectives Retained But Modified From Healthy People 2010

- EH HP2020-13: Eliminate elevated blood lead levels in children.
- EH HP2020-16: Reduce indoor allergen levels.
- EH HP2020-17: Increase the proportion of persons living in homes at risk that have an operating radon mitigation system.
- EH HP2020-18: Increase the number of new homes constructed with radon-reducing features, especially in high-radon-potential areas.
- EH HP2020-20: Increase the proportion of persons living in pre-1978 housing that has been tested for the presence of lead-based paint hazards.

Objectives New to Healthy People 2020

- EH HP2020-24: Decrease the number of U.S. homes that are found to have lead-based paint or related hazards.

[Click here](#) for the complete list related to environmental health.

For more information on Healthy People 2010, see <http://www.healthypeople.gov/Default.htm>.

CPSC Releases Reports on Smelly, Corrosive Chinese Drywall

On November 23, the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) released a series of reports on its findings to date regarding drywall imported from China and used in new home construction in 2006 and 2007, particularly in Florida. Similar drywall was also widely used in the restoration of Gulf Coast homes beginning in 2005, following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which struck in 2004.

The CPSC findings reveal that the agency has gotten more than 2,000 reports from consumers in 32 states, DC and Puerto Rico about contaminated drywall in homes. Most commonly, occupants have complained of rotten-egg smells; irritated eyes, skin and lungs; asthma attacks; and headaches. Several occupants say that copper pipes and electrical wiring turned black from corrosion.

CPSC concludes that there is a “strong association” between homes built with the imported drywall and levels of hydrogen sulfide in the indoor air. The report also makes the link between the drywall’s sulfur content and health and maintenance problems, noting that “[i]n ways still to be determined, hydrogen sulfide gas is being created in homes built with Chinese drywall.”

Tests performed by a CPSC contractor also found elevated levels of formaldehyde in the air in homes with the imported drywall, which the CPSC said is not unusual in well-insulated new homes where a variety of building materials and furnishings may produce formaldehyde off-gassing. CPSC said that the hydrogen sulfide and formaldehyde levels found were lower than those known to cause irritation, the two compounds may be combining, either additively or synergistically, to produce higher levels of irritation than either would alone.

The reports also addressed concerns that corrosion of copper and silver caused by hydrogen sulfide could cause long-term safety hazards because of damage to electrical wiring or copper gas lines. CPSC did not find evidence that such parts were in danger of imminent failure, however they said the sample size of their survey was too small to rule out future failure from long-term exposure. CPSC’s contractor sampled 41 “complaint” homes in five states selected from CPSC’s consumer incident report database, and 10 non-complaint homes built around the same time in the same area as the complaint homes. CPSC plans to continue to investigate any possible long-term health and safety issues.

Finally, the new CPSC reports advise occupants to keep indoor air as cool and dry as possible, refrain from smoking and open windows, and spend as much time outdoors as possible. For more information, see [CPSC’s Nov. 23 press release](#), and a [CPSC web page](#) with links to the reports.



