



March 5, 2010

Testimony before the Environmental Matters Committee
Maryland House of Delegates

HB 1153 – Environment - Reducing Lead Risk in Housing - Lead Paint Dust Testing

Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland PIRG and Maryland LCV support the passage of House Bill 1153, which would modify the Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing Law to require dust testing for lead rather than providing the option for a visual inspection.

In 1951, Baltimore's Commissioner of Health, Dr. Huntington Williams, banned the use of lead pigment in interior household paint. In 1978, Congress acted and passed federal legislation to ban lead from household paint. However, old lead paint continues to be a major source of exposure to children that live in older homes.

It is important to review what is at stake:

Health Effects

Lead is toxic to the nervous system and to development.

- Very low levels of lead poisoning have been linked to kidney damage, learning difficulties, mental and physical developmental problems and behavioral changes.ⁱ
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that at least a half million children in the U.S. suffer from irreversible neurological damage from lead poisoning.ⁱⁱ
- Lead poisoning costs the country an estimated \$43.4 billion in treatment and lost productivity each year.ⁱⁱⁱ

The good news is that the process of dust-testing is an accurate and reliable way to determine if lead poses a danger in the home. The antiquated approach of a visual inspection for lead hazards is just not reliable enough. Currently, 77% of Maryland rental property owners that are required to comply with the risk reduction standards are voluntarily choosing the lead dust-testing method instead of the visual inspection. That 77% should be applauded for their effort to ensure that their rental properties are safe and healthy. However, we should not be satisfied with 77%. It is critical that all children live in a home that is safe from chemicals that are proven to cause irreversible damage. HB 1153 takes a significant and sensible step to protect our children from lead exposure.

ⁱ U.S. EPA, *Lead in Paint, Dust, and Soil: Basic Information*, 03 March 2006, downloaded from www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadinfo.htm#facts, 27 March 2006.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Factsheet*, downloaded from www.cdc.gov on 19 April 2004; Pamela Meyer et al, CDC, *Surveillance for Elevated Blood Lead Levels Among Children --- United States, 1997—2001*, 12 September 2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, *Lead Fact Sheet*, March 2003.