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President's message: New lead rules bring opportunity

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We all get frustrated when we hear about the latest batch of government regulations that's headed our way. "How much will it cost? How much time will I have to spend in the classroom?" we all ask. But when it comes to the EPA's Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting (RRP) regulations, whose training rules take full effect on April 22nd, we're all going to have an important opportunity, not just another obligation.

This opportunity will be to educate our customers and potential customers, not only about lead-hazard safety, but about how dangerous it can be to use those cheap but uneducated and uninsured "station wagon bandits." It could bring us a little closer to getting those illegal contractors off our streets.

The RRP rule has brought with it some corresponding and tough changes to the Rhode Island Lead Hazard Control Standards from the Dept. of Health. Exceeding the federal regulations, the state rules require that any company doing applicable work in any property built before 1978 must be a licensed Lead Hazard Control Firm.

To become licensed, a company must have at least one employee who has successfully completed the 8-Hour Lead Safe Remodeler/Renovator Course and become a licensed Lead Safe Remodeler/Renovator. This employee must supervise the jobsite when any work covered by the lead-hazard rules is going on.

It's best for any company to have as many employees as they can - all if possible - take the course and get licensed. The Rhode Island Builders Association offers the 8-Hour Lead Safe Remodeler/Renovator Course on a regular basis.

One of the rules says that, before you start a job, you must give the property owner or tenant a copy of the Rhode Island Renovate Right booklet. This is a perfect opportunity for you and your employees to do a little extra education! Namely, do everything you can to stress that:

- * A contractor who is not registered or properly insured (and in this case licensed for lead hazard work) is a danger to the home and family, financially and health-wise.
- * If the contractor has an accident on the property and does not have proper workers' compensation coverage, a homeowner's insurance policy will not cover the cost.
- * Lead hazards are far more likely to be stirred up, creating a danger to the family, when an untrained fly-by-night is on the job instead of a legitimate, licensed contractor.
- * The fact that the homeowner might know the unregistered or unlicensed contractor as a friend, relative or local moonlighter isn't worth the risk.

Waste no time in showing homeowners your contractor registration card and Lead Safe Remodeler/Renovator license, along with proof of workers' compensation insurance and contractor liability insurance.

Tell them: "This is what you ask to see before hiring any contractor!"

There's a flip side to this issue. While there are limits to the enforcement capabilities of both the EPA and the state Health Dept., contractors who are obeying the law can help by reporting suspicious contractor activity. While this might not be something all of us feel comfortable doing, we must remember that illegal contractors are not only putting homeowners and their children in danger by doing incompetent work, they are taking food out of the mouths of you and your own children by doing work that you should be doing!

Better to report suspicious jobsite activity. In the case of possible violations of the RRP Rule, do so by calling the Health Dept. at (401) 222-5960. The EPA has an online complaint form: www.epa.gov/region1/enforcement/leadpaint/PreRuleComplaintForm.html

Let's do our part to stay educated, keep the public safe, and in doing so strengthen our own businesses!

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