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Lead Hazard Reduction Program earns "green" rank

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I am pleased to announce that our Warwick Lead Hazard Reduction Program (WLHRP) has earned another "green" ranking from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The WLHRP is administered by the city's Office of Housing & Community Development.

Each quarter, HUD assesses a variety of factors to determine an agency's overall performance based on its three-month report and grant work plan. These factors include meeting established benchmarks such as completing lead hazard control in residential units and progress in drawing down grant funds relative to work performed.

The green designation - HUD's highest - means that the city is meeting and/or exceeding standard, primary benchmarks. Specifically, the city is ahead in target units completed and target line of credit control system drawdowns. The program's overall performance is good, HUD said.

The program began in 2003, with a \$1.8 million, three-year grant from HUD. Last September, HUD awarded the city a second, three-year grant of \$2.1 million - the largest single award in city history - to continue the program.

Lead-based paint was often used in homes built before 1978. Particularly high concentrations of lead in paint were used before 1950. According to the 2000 census, over 80% of Warwick's housing stock was constructed prior to 1979 and over 53% was built before 1960.

This paint can peel, chip, or crack away. People who breathe contaminated paint dust can be exposed to the harmful substance. Children eating paint during normal childhood hand-to-mouth activities are also exposed to lead. Significant lead exposure at a young age can cause brain damage, short attention span, and lower IQ. Lead has also been linked with difficulties in learning language. Exposure during pregnancy can jeopardize fetal development. At high doses, some signs of childhood lead poisoning are hyperactivity, emotional outbreaks, and lack of attention, fatigue, and delinquency, loss of coordination, pain and soreness. It is important to realize that children in the early stages of lead poisoning show few symptoms. The best way to combat lead poisoning is by removing lead from the child's environment.

Our program's goal is to reduce the exposure of Warwick's children under six years of age to the hazards of lead paint; increase public awareness about the hazards of lead paint; promote safe and effective methods of reducing lead paint hazards; provide grants/loans to homeowners and landlords to reduce lead in low/moderate income households; and to collect information on the most cost-effective ways to reduce lead paint hazards.

To date, a total of 127 units were made lead-safe through funding from the 2003-06 grant. The second grant cycle is effective through 2009, with 125 units to be made lead-safe. Currently, work on six units has been completed.

Scott Avedisian is the mayor of Warwick.

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