



THE SAFE USE OF PAINT STRIPPERS

The Issue

Paint strippers are handy during home renovations. Careful use is required due to the strong chemicals that these products contain.

Background

When it comes to removing old paint, strippers that contain methylene chloride, also known as dichloromethane, are fast-acting, versatile and easy to use. In fact, nearly all paint removers on the market contain methylene chloride. Compared to sanding, which produces a lot of dust in the air, paint strippers are one of the best and least harmful ways to remove lead-based paint. However, it is important to take proper safety precautions and to follow the manufacturer's instructions.

The Risks of Paint Strippers

Health Canada considers methylene chloride to be "toxic" to human health. When exposed over a long period of time to high levels of this chemical, lab animals developed cancer. Scientists believe that prolonged exposure could cause cancer in humans as well. For that reason, you should limit your exposure to any toxic chemical.

Methylene chloride is clear, colourless and has a mildly sweet odour. It can cause irritation if it gets on to your skin. Breathing in the vapours can cause sluggishness, irritability, light-headedness, nausea and headaches, depending on the amount breathed in.

Minimizing Your Risk

Using paint strippers indoors will contaminate the air, putting building occupants at risk. To reduce the risk to yourself and others, move the object you are stripping outdoors. Here are some other suggestions for reducing the risk:

- Before starting, turn the furnace and furnace fan off, tape over the air supply and return registers, and open windows in the room where you are working.
- Make sure your work area is well ventilated. Place an electric fan by an open window to blow the contaminated air outside.
- Always wear goggles and gloves.
- If you get stripper on your skin, wash it off right away.
- Wear a good quality breathing mask designed for use with organic chemicals, these can be purchased at a paint store or safety equipment outlet.
- To prevent leaded paint dust and stripper-soaked scrapings from being spread around the house, keep a pair of coveralls and work shoes to wear only in the work area and wash all work clothes separately from other clothing.

- If you develop breathing problems, dizziness, nausea or headaches while working with paint strippers, get some fresh air immediately. Better yet, work for ten minutes at a time and then take a fresh air break.
- Never eat, drink or smoke while removing paint.
- Consider hiring a professional if you do not want to be exposed to the hazards of chemical strippers.

Need More Info?

For further information, check this reference:

Advice on the Use of Chemical Strippers to Remove Leaded Paint:
CMHC Publications,
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation,
700 Montreal Road
Ottawa, ON, K1A 0P7,
(613) 748-2000
or www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca

It's Your Health - Lead Based Paint
(<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/products/leadpaint.html>)

For more information on the history of lead in paint, contact the Canadian

Paint and Coatings Association,
9900 Cavendish Boulevard,
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St-Laurent, Quebec, H4M 2V2
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fax:(514)745-2031.
www.cdnpaint.org