

Coast Guard Safe Homes Initiative - Frequently Asked Questions

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What prompted the Coast Guard to launch the Safe Homes Initiative effort?

Recent national events regarding private-public venture housing for active duty members raised concerns about unmitigated environmental health risks. Additionally, in June 2019, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced tighter standards to protect children from the harmful effects of lead exposure. The Coast Guard also learned that a few of our housing units, which were located beside a lighthouse, presented a lead risk to the families living in those homes. In addition to moving the families, the service decided to launch a national initiative to make sure all of our housing units are safe from environmental health risks. Out of an abundance of caution, the Coast Guard is evaluating every housing unit in its inventory, and taking whatever actions are necessary to ensure our members' safety and compliance with the new EPA limits.

How did the Coast Guard decide which housing units needed further investigation?

The Coast Guard Housing Program, in consultation with Coast Guard Civil Engineers and Health and Safety staff, expanded a review of lead, asbestos and radon in Coast Guard-owned housing. The purpose was to assess housing lead, asbestos and radon records, identify any gaps in data, and ensure that any hazards were properly mitigated. While we expect that most housing units are safe and in compliance with all Federal environmental health standards, we are aware that some of our records are incomplete. As we identify units that are missing abatement records and third-party clearances, we will have state-certified contractors complete risk assessments at each of those housing units. Our goal is to ensure the safety of our housing units and identify hazards and appropriate control measures if they exist.

Don't you already test our homes for environmental contaminants?

Coast Guard housing inspectors conduct frequent visits to all units that we own. These include annual inspections plus multiple inspections during a change of occupancy. Additional testing and verification is sometimes provided by certified third-party experts. While we expect that most housing units are safe and in compliance with all Federal environmental health standards, we are aware that some of our records are incomplete. As we identify units that are missing abatement and third-party clearance records, we will have state-certified contractors complete risk assessments at each of those housing units. Our goal is to ensure the safety of our housing units and identify hazards and appropriate control measures if they exist.

My home is on the list of homes to be assessed. Should I get my children tested for elevated lead blood levels? What other tests do you recommend?

The standard protocol, consistent with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidance, is to offer blood lead screening for pregnant women and children under 7 years old when risk assessments reveal a potential exposure risk. You are encouraged to talk with your family doctor if you have concerns and about what makes the most sense for your family.

When my children’s blood lead level was tested, the result came back elevated. What should I do now?

Your child’s doctor will go over the results of the blood lead level testing with you in detail. If you child’s blood lead levels are elevated, the doctor will discuss the next steps. Depending on the exact blood lead level and the clinical signs and symptoms seen by the physician, your child will be monitored and treated as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. We highly recommend you share these findings with your command.

Can lead dust be effectively removed from floors, carpet, furniture, etc.?

In most cases, lead dust can be effectively removed from surfaces, provided they are in fair or better condition. Dust removal work may be performed by contractors or maintenance staff. Individuals performing the work should be properly equipped and trained in dust removal.

Additional details: When lead dust hazards are identified, an assessment is conducted to determine the presence, type, severity, location (including lead hazards in paint, dust, and soil) and a recommended way to control hazards in accordance with HUD Guidelines. Lead dust meeting or exceeding the standards of Action or Major Finding Levels¹, require an on-site investigation by a state-certified risk assessor. Following the risk assessment, the steps normally include (1) communicating results and corrective actions with residents, (2) correcting any known or suspected lead-based paint hazards before dust removal and (3) implementing other interim controls as deemed necessary by the assessment. Chapter 11 Section V of the HUD Guide addresses the process to effectively remove and control lead dust hazards on carpet, hard surfaces, area rugs, carpet, upholstered furniture, and drop ceilings and ductwork, if needed. We recommend visiting: <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/LBPH-13.PDF>

What should I do if my personal property (furniture, electronics, etc) is damaged by lead contamination and no longer usable?

If you have insurance for your personal property, you must first file a claim with your insurance provider. You are required to file with your insurance company before filing a claim against the government. If you don’t have personal property insurance, or if the coverage doesn’t entirely cover the cost of the property loss, you can then file a claim with Legal Services Command. You may also file a claim with the Coast Guard for the cost of any deductibles that are assessed by the private insurer. Legal assistance is available by contacting the Legal Service Command at 757-628-4192. To file a claim or ask a question, email Legal Service Command at D05-smbclaims@uscg.mil.

Where can I get more information about the impact of lead in children?

We recommend visiting:

¹ “Monitoring Level”, “Action Level”, and “Major Finding” regarding lead, asbestos, and radon are defined in the Safety and Environmental Health Manual, COMDTINST M5100.47(series). https://cg.portal.uscg.mil/sites/externaldata/Directives/CIM_5100_47C.pdf

- The CDC's childhood lead poisoning prevention site: <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/default.htm>
- The EPA's Lead site: <https://www.epa.gov/lead>
- The EPA's Children's Environmental Health site: <https://www.epa.gov/children>

Will you be testing my home's basement? What about the soil around the home?

If additional environmental testing is needed, the scope of work will include your unit's crawl space, basement and exterior soil.

Will I need to be relocated? If so, can we stay in the same school district?

If your housing unit requires work to mitigate hazards, your family may be relocated at government expense to suitable nearby housing. All efforts will be made to keep your children in their current school district, and to make the move as easy on your family as possible.

In the event I am relocated, what entitlements can I elect to receive to ease the burden of moving?

If you must be relocated from CG-Housing, you may be entitled to:

1. A FULLY FUNDED government move
2. Partial DLA, paid up front
3. Three months advance BAH, if desired
4. Full BAH upon departure from CG Housing
5. Access to a government lease, if desired
6. Access to temporary, government-funded quarters, to gap any time awaiting follow-on housing.
7. Access to a Coast Guard Mutual Assistance (CGMA) loan and/or grant (see CGMA bulletin for details)

Can I get DLA if I'm required to move out of government housing?

Yes, you will receive partial DLA for the local move you will be executing. The purpose of the dislocation allowance (DLA) is to partially reimburse members for incurred relocation expenses. The type, amount and timing of DLA varies according to the situation. According to Federal law, members ordered to vacate family-type Government Quarters must be paid a one-time payment of partial DLA for a qualifying event. For more detailed descriptions and explanations on when DLA is authorized please visit Chapter 0505 "Dislocation Allowance" in the Joint Travel Regulations (JTR):

<https://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/Docs/perdiem/JTR.pdf>. Also, note that Coast Guard Mutual Assistance is providing various assistance such as grants, loans, and reimbursement for childcare expenses required during the move. Make sure to visit <https://www.cgmahq.org/> and review the CGMA resource bulletins posted on <https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Safe-Homes-Initiative/>.

If my family used to live at one of the impacted locations, should I get my children tested for elevated lead blood levels?

You and your child are no longer at risk if you moved from that unit more than six months ago. However, if you or your child experience any symptoms of lead toxicity at any time, you should discuss them with your medical provider. For reference, symptoms of lead toxicity can include a delay in development, learning difficulties, irritability, loss of appetite, fatigue, weight loss, vomiting, abdominal pain, hearing loss, constipation or seizures.