

# Michigan lowers acceptable blood lead levels for workers

Lansing, MI – Michigan has become the first state to lower permissible blood lead levels – by as much as half – to protect workers, the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration recently announced.

MIOSHA's new rules, which took effect Dec. 11, require workers to be removed from lead exposure when their blood lead level reaches 30 micrograms per deciliter of blood. Additionally, workers may not resume work until their BLL is less than 15 micrograms per deciliter.

The previous rules, which aligned with current federal OSHA standards for lead and were based on scientific data that is nearly four decades old, allowed for workers to have a BLL of 50 to 60 micrograms per deciliter before they had to be removed from lead exposure, and they could return to work when their BLL was less than 40 micrograms per deciliter.

"Fact-based rule promulgation is an essential element of MIOSHA's mission to protect the safety and health of Michigan workers," MIOSHA Director Bart Pickelman said in Dec. 13 press release. "These updated worker blood lead levels reflect today's knowledge and are considered necessary to safeguard employees ... from the hazards of lead."

Work environments can be the greatest source of lead exposure for adults, according to MIOSHA. Among the most common job tasks in which exposure may occur are abrasive blasting of bridges, overpasses or water towers; manufacturing or refurbishing batteries; demolition or remodeling activities; and working in gun ranges.

Prolonged exposure to lead can lead to abdominal pain, depression, constipation, irritability and nausea, according

to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It also can lead to higher risk of heart disease, kidney disease, reduced fertility and high blood pressure.

“We can say with pride that Michigan now leads the nation in protecting workers from harmful lead exposure on the job by being the first state in the nation to update its standards to dramatically reduce allowable blood lead levels,” Michael Berneking, president of the Michigan Occupational and Environmental Medical Association, said in the release. “We hope that other states and the federal government will look to Michigan as an example and work toward making changes in the lead standard in their jurisdictions to safeguard the working populations.”

MIOSHA enforcement divisions are implementing a 60-day temporary stay on the enforcement of the new BLL to allow employers time to ensure compliance with the requirements, the release states.

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