



AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

INVESTIGATION OF LEAD EXPOSURE AMONG SHIPYARD WORKERS

Superior, Wisconsin

THE PROBLEM

On March 28, 2016, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) received laboratory reports of two workers from the same shipyard in Superior, Wisconsin. Both workers had blood lead levels greater than 40 micrograms per deciliter, which is over eight times the level considered elevated by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. These two workers had been retrofitting a vessel's engine room since January 4, 2016. Work at the shipyard was temporarily suspended. DHS and the Minnesota Department of Health began an investigation to assess more than 350 employees and contractors who were potentially exposed to lead.

WHAT WE DID

In order to handle this large-scale and dynamic investigation, DHS activated an Incident Command System (ICS). Over the course of the investigation, the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program staff lent time, technical expertise, and analytical skills to the investigation. We also interviewed potentially exposed workers about their risks and experiences at the shipyard.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

The investigation collected 649 blood lead test results, interviewed 185 workers, and identified 322 household members who could have been affected by take-home lead. We created materials that informed physicians of adult lead poisoning risks, trained local health departments in conducting interviews with exposed workers, published an [MMWR article](#), and wrote an after action report to help us improve response to future incidents of this sort. After this incident, the shipyard changed policies to help protect workers and minimize their exposure to lead.

LEARN MORE ABOUT LEAD
WORKER SAFETY:

dhs.wisconsin.gov/adult-lead

WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM
Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health

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