

## EPA To Regulate Home Improvements

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is proposing new broad restrictions and rules on homeowners and contractors who contemplate remodeling or renovating homes built prior to 1978. For any work that could disturb painted surfaces—including removing paint or wallpaper, and replacement of windows—homeowners and contractors would have to take various steps to minimize debris exposure, including using special vacuums, sealing off work areas and posting warning signs.

The purpose of the regulation is to minimize exposure of children to lead-based paint. Such paint was banned in 1978 when it was found to be a hazard to infants and young children who are more receptive to absorbing lead more readily than adults. The regulations homeowners, as well as rental property, but does not affect community buildings or day-care centers where children may frequent.

About sixty-five percent of current U.S. housing stock was built prior to 1978, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Renovating older homes can stir up lead dust that can be ingested or inhaled. Children are more vulnerable because they absorb lead more readily and are more likely to put dusty hands into their mouths.

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) says some members estimate the rule could boost the price of home renovations by twenty-five percent for consumers because of extra insurance expenses, training and special equipment. The EPA estimates that the rule would cost the industry approximately \$5 million a year.

Should the rule be finalized in its current form, it could change the way many contractors work. *At least one contractor on a work site would have to be EPA certified in lead-safe work practices* and would have to train workers on site. Presently, general contractors involved in routine remodeling are required under federal law to give families an EPA pamphlet on how to protect themselves from lead paint hazards during renovations.

Contractors are also concerned that working under the assumption that lead is present will require expensive liability insurance on top of costs related to paperwork, training and clean-up equipment. For example, a special HEPA vacuum (required) can cost more than \$1,000 and replacement filters run some \$250, says Gary Sushauer, environmental policy analyst of the NAHB.

While contractors laud the goal of reducing exposure to lead-based paint, they criticize the proposal as being too

sweeping. The NAHB is studying whether routine jobs, such as window replacement, could pose a lead paint risk and plans to submit its findings to the EPA. "It's a question of whether the EPA is painting with too broad a brush," remarked Gary Sushauer. Homes where children are not present may still be subject to the new rule.

Some 300,000 children in the U.S. have elevated levels of lead in their blood according to the federal Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention. It can affect a child's nervous system, causing reduced IQ and learning disabilities. In large doses it can cause blindness, convulsions and death. Lead exposure in pregnant women can effect fetal development and cause miscarriages.

Elevated levels are widely defined as 10 micrograms per deciliter of blood or higher, according to the CDC, but no safe levels have been established, according to Mary Jean Brown, chief of the CDC's lead poisoning prevention branch. Lead levels as low as 2 micrograms per deciliter have been known to affect youngsters' school performance, she said.

"We are concerned about children, but we just don't feel that remodeling is a big cause of lead poisoning," says Michael Heuser, vice-chair of government affairs for the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). The NAHB and NARI have worked with their members on voluntary safe practices. The proposal rule should

*continued on page 4*

## Homeland: Homegrown Pork

Since September 11, Congress has appropriated nearly \$180 billion to protect Americans from terrorism. Total spending on homeland security in 2006 will be at least \$500 billion—roughly \$450 per American household. But far from making us more secure, the money is being allocated like so much pork. States and cities are spending federal homeland security grants on pet projects that have nothing to do with homeland security; state and local officials fight over who will get the biggest share of the money, regardless of whether they have a legitimate claim to it.

When the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created, proponents argued that we'd get an entity with sole fiscal responsibility for the government's efforts against terrorism,

## Outsourcing...

*continued from page 1*

In the business world group teams grapple with finding answers to processes or problems together in a number of fields, so scholars have begun to suggest that getting students to work together to find answers and learn to search information centers such as the internet may be the way of the future. It's called "collaborative learning."

"What we've got to teach kids are the tools to access that information," says Philadelphia school districts chief academic officer, Gregory Thornton. "Cheating is not the word anymore."

In Ohio, students at Cincinnati Country Day school can take their laptops into some tests and search Cliff's Notes on-line. At a school in Newport Beach, California, seventh-graders are looking at each others hand-held computers to get answers to their science drills. In San Diego, California, high-schoolers can roam free on the internet during English exams.

The changes, prompting scholastic debate, are comparable to those caused when calculators became available in the early 1970s. Then, teachers grappled with letting kids use such tools, or requiring long division and other calculations by hand. Though initially banned, calculators have gained classroom acceptance and, since 1994, have been allowed in the SAT tests.

Access to the internet provides a vast trove of information rather than simply having a textbook at hand. That degree of collaboration with technology flies in the face of some deeply entrenched teaching methods. "Grabbing test answers of the internet is a crutch," says Charles Alexander, academic dean at elite Groton School in Massachusetts.

Opinions among schools and academicians vary over accepting or questioning this new way of accessing knowledge. Karen Waples, a teacher of government at Cherry Creek High School near Denver, has kids team up on some of their exams even when they're multiple choice. "It doesn't hurt," she adds, "that it has the side benefit of relieving the stress that students say comes from keeping all the answers in their heads." Waples says,

thus increasing transparency, enhancing efficiency, and facilitating information-sharing. Instead the opposite happened.

Much homeland security spending takes place outside of the department. The total amount directed to homeland security activities in fiscal year 2006 is roughly \$50 billion. But \$23 billion of

"I tell them it's a closed-book, open-friend (test).

Educators say the concept of collaborative learning, which has students working in groups and essentially answering text questions or tackling assignments for each other, continues to gain acceptance. Proponents say it can help teach group skills and critical thinking. In the real world much of the work and problem solving is being done more and more by team effort.

There are even new twists in the old open-book text. At Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, Temba Maqubela has started giving students an option on their environmental chemistry tests. Choose to take the exams with their notes and an open book and they will not receive any grade higher than a B, even if they get everything right. Or, go for the top A on their own knowledge and ability. "There's no shame in not knowing the answers," says Mr. Maqubela. "I have a feeling that some of the department heads might warm up to it."

When it comes to the most critical evaluations students face, such as advanced placement tests or the SAT, there's no internet surfing allowed. From graduate school entrance exams to real-world job interviews, candidates are expected to perform solo.

Letting students get answers from each other or on-line is also a luxury critics say only elite schools with high-performing kids can afford. Most of the new testing techniques are occurring at private or well-funded schools, with individual teachers taking the initiative on some exams and also applying for the grants to do so.

Perhaps group learning is the way of the future, but individual initiative must still be encouraged and stressed. In the future world, if the power fails or your Palm Pilot goes dead, some must have the ability to find answers bare and without a crutch.

—Wally Reemelin  
Excerpts, Wall Street Journal

## In Memoriam



Mary Ladd  
Marian Walsh

that will be spent by departments other than DHS. Not surprisingly, a large portion—\$9.5 billion—goes to the Department of Defense. But other funding decisions are more curious. Why, for instance, are the Environmental protection Agency, the Commerce Department, and the National Aeronautics

*continued on page 4*