



May 24, 2024

[Resident Name]

Freedom's Path at Ft. Harrison
3720 Liberty Ln
Fort Harrison, MT 59636

RE: Notice of Intent to Fully Abate Project-Based Voucher Program Housing Assistance Payments

Dear [Resident Name]:

On May 16, the Housing Division at the Montana Department of Commerce notified the owner of Freedom's Path at Fort Harrison of its intent to fully abate (not pay) payments from the Project-Based Voucher Program Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) due to breaches of the contract the organization has with state and federal governments.

Those breaches include the owner's failure to maintain the property in accordance with certain health standards required by the federal government, including those standards intended to protect residents from lead exposure. Specifically, the owner does not appear to have taken the appropriate actions to address the presence of lead-based paint hazards in and on the property. Under federal law, the Department cannot provide additional federal funds to Freedom's Path until the hazards are addressed.

The notice to the owner specifies that all payments under this program will be suspended on June 30, 2024, unless all the hazards are addressed before that date. The notice directs the owner to address the presence of lead-based paint hazards and to conduct clearance testing of all units and the property. The clearance testing must demonstrate that units and the property are safe from lead hazards.

Last week's action is the latest step in a more than two-year long effort to remedy this situation at Fort Harrison Veterans Residences. The residents of this facility are Montana veterans and their families, including young children, who represent the best of our country and have made sacrifices to protect the United States at home and abroad.

The Department believes the owner of this facility has an obligation to honor residents for their service to the country and that Freedom's Path can do that by addressing the lead-based hazards.





COMMERCE

What Does This Mean for Freedom's Path at Ft. Harrison Residents?

All residents should continue to make their timely rental payments for their portion of rent. Federal regulations—including 24 C.F.R. § 983.353(b)(4)—prohibit the owner or property management agent from terminating any resident's tenancy due to Commerce's nonpayment of the federal Housing Assistance Payments.

Next Steps

Residents do not need to take any action right now. Freedom's Path may not terminate any resident's tenancy due to Commerce's nonpayment of federal funds, if that occurs.

Commerce will continue to work with the owner and other involved federal agencies with the goal of achieving a resolution. Residents will be notified in the event of any significant changes that may impact your federal housing subsidy and/or your residency at Freedom's Path.

The Department recognizes the owner has put the residents of Freedom's Path in an extremely difficult and potentially disruptive situation. We also understand that residents have made considerable personal sacrifices to serve our country and deserve a safe and affordable home.

The Department has attempted to work with the owner with the goal of resolving the lead hazards at the property. We will continue to do everything we can to ensure the Freedom's Path at Fort Harrison property is safe for all residents, children, and visitors.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office at any time, by calling 406-841-2840 or emailing housing@mt.gov. Your call or email will be directed to an available staff member knowledgeable about this situation. Ensuring the health and safety of all Freedom's Path at Fort Harrison residents is our top priority.

Regards,

Cheryl Cohen
Division Administrator

cc: Adrian Spencer, VA Homeless & Vocational Rehabilitation Program Manager



Frequently Asked Questions – Health Related

Publicly available FAQs from health-related resources:

[CDC Health Effects of Lead Exposure](#)
[HUD Healthy Homes for Healthy Families | About Lead-Based Paint](#)
[Healthy Homes Lead Hazard Control Brochure](#)
[U.S. Department of Labor OSHA | Lead Health Effects](#)
[National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences | Lead Information](#)

FAQ below from [Lead | US EPA](#)

What is Lead?

Lead is a naturally occurring element found in small amounts in the earth's crust. While it has some beneficial uses, it can be toxic to humans and animals, causing health effects.

What are the possible sources of lead in my home?

Lead-based paint is still present in millions of homes, normally under layers of newer paint. If the paint is in good shape, the lead-based paint is usually not a problem. Deteriorating lead-based paint (peeling, chipping, chalking, cracking, damaged, or damp) is a hazard and needs immediate attention.

Lead in household dust results from indoor sources such as old lead-based paint on surfaces that are frequently in motion or bump or rub together (such as window frames), deteriorating old lead-based paint on any surface, home repair activities, tracking lead-contaminated soil from the outdoors into the indoor environment, or even from lead dust on clothing worn at a job site. Even in well-maintained homes, lead dust can form when lead-based paint is scraped, sanded or heated during home repair activities. Lead paint chips and dust can get on surfaces and objects that people touch. Settled lead dust can re-enter the air when the home is vacuumed or swept, or people walk through it. Soil, yards and playgrounds can become contaminated when exterior lead-based paint from houses or buildings flakes or peels and gets into the soil.

Who is at risk?

Children:

Lead is particularly dangerous to children because their growing bodies absorb more lead than adults do, and their brains and nervous systems are more sensitive to the damaging effects of lead. Babies and young children can also be more highly exposed to lead because they often put their hands and other objects that can have lead from dust or soil on them into their mouths. Children may also be exposed to lead by eating and drinking food or water containing lead or from dishes or glasses that contain lead, inhaling lead dust from lead-based paint or lead-contaminated soil or from playing with toys with lead-based paint.

Adults, Including Pregnant Women:

Adults may be exposed to lead by eating and drinking food or water containing lead or from dishes or glasses that contain lead. They may also breathe lead dust by spending time in areas where lead-based paint is deteriorating, and during renovation or repair work that disturbs painted surfaces in older homes and buildings.



Working in a job or engaging in hobbies where lead is used, such as making stained glass, can increase exposure as can certain folk remedies containing lead. A pregnant woman's exposure to lead from these sources is of particular concern because it can result in exposure to her developing baby.

What are the Health Effects of Lead?

Lead can affect almost every organ and system in your body. Children six years old and younger are most susceptible to the effects of lead.

Children

Even low levels of lead in the blood of children can result in:

- Behavior and learning problems
- Lower IQ and Hyperactivity
- Slowed growth
- Hearing Problems
- Anemia

In rare cases, ingestion of lead can cause seizures, coma and even death.

Pregnant Women

Lead can accumulate in our bodies over time, where it is stored in bones along with calcium. During pregnancy, lead is released from the mother's bones along with calcium and can pass from the mother exposing the fetus or the breastfeeding infant to lead. This can result in serious effects to the developing fetus and infant, including:

- Cause the baby to be born too early or too small;
- Hurt the baby's brain, kidneys, and nervous system;
- Increase the likelihood of learning or behavioral problems; and
- Put the mother at risk for miscarriage.

Find out more about lead's effects on pregnancy and lactating women:

- [Effects of Workplace Hazards on Female Reproductive Health](#), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.
- [Guidelines for the Identification and Management of Lead Exposure in Pregnant and Lactating Women](#), National Center for Environmental Health.

Other Adults

Lead is also harmful to other adults. Adults exposed to lead can suffer from:

- Cardiovascular effects, increased blood pressure and incidence of hypertension;
- Decreased kidney function; and
- Reproductive problems (in both men and women).

How can I do reduce my exposure to lead? [Excerpts from Lead Hazard Control Brochure:](#)

- Mop smooth floors (using a damp mop) weekly to control dust.
- Vacuum carpets and upholstery to remove dust, preferably using a vacuum with a HEPA filter or a "higher efficiency" collection bag.
- Take off shoes when entering the house.
- Pick up loose paint chips carefully with a paper towel; wipe the surface clean with a wet paper towel.





For your child:

- Frequently wash your child's hands and toys to reduce exposure.
- Use cold tap water for drinking and cooking.
- Avoid using home remedies (such as arzacón, greta, pay-loo-ah, or litargirio) and cosmetics (such as kohl or alkohol) that contain lead.
- Have your child's blood lead level tested at age 1 and 2.
- Children from 3 to 6 years of age should have their blood tested if they have not been tested before and:
 - They live in or regularly visit a house built before 1950;
 - They live in or regularly visit a house built before 1978 with on-going or recent renovations or remodeling; or
 - They have a sibling or playmate who has or did have lead poisoning.

What laws protect people from lead?

Congress has passed laws related to lead that protect the public. As lead can be found in many different places there may be different laws or ways the government regulates exposure. Many laws are administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) including:

- [Toxic Substances Control Act \(TSCA\)](#)
- [Residential Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction Action of 1992](#)
- [Clean Air Act](#)
- [Clean Water Act](#)
- [Safe Drinking water Act](#)
- [Resource Conservation and Recovery Act](#)
- [Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act](#)

The laws that pertain to this scenario are in **bold font**. Other regulations or guidance can inform how different entities should handle lead. Regulations include, but are not limited to:

- [40 CFR part 745 – Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention in Certain Residential Structures](#)
- [Lead Renovation Repair and Painting Program Rule \(RRP\)](#)
- [HUD PIH Notice 2017-13](#)

How can I find a low-cost health care provider?

If your child uses Medicaid, blood lead testing is covered. Your child can receive a test from any provider who accepts Medicaid. Your closest Community Health Center, Public Health Department or Critical Access Hospital can aid in finding a provider, applying for Medicaid, or billing your plan for the blood lead testing. If you are on a different insurance than Medicaid, it is best to talk to your primary care provider and insurance company provider to discuss if your plan will cover lead testing.

