

## PRESS RELEASE

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## **CGR Releases Findings for 1<sup>st</sup> Year of Rochester's Lead Law** ***Nearly 1,400 Housing Units Being Made Lead Safe, Costs for Compliance*** ***Lower than Anticipated***

*Rochester, NY—December 10, 2007—* Findings from the first year of a two-year study assessing the impact of Rochester's new "Lead Based Paint Poisoning Prevention" law were released today by the Center for Governmental Research (CGR).

"Nearly 1,400 housing units have been, or soon will be, made lead safe as a result of inspections conducted in the law's first year," said Rochelle Ruffer Ph.D., CGR associate director for economic analysis. "We also found that the cost to landlords for compliance was lower than anticipated."

Rochester's law took effect in July 2006 and applies to rental properties built prior to 1978. It requires that all housing units inspected by the City undergo visual inspection for deteriorated paint. In addition, in the first year dust wipes were also required if the housing units were in any of 31 census tracts identified as having concentrated numbers of children with elevated blood levels (EBLs). These tracts comprise what the City refers to as Neighborhood Empowerment Team (NET) areas B and F (see *map*). Dust wipe testing is designed to find lead paint hazards that aren't visible with the naked eye.

Childhood lead poisoning is known to cause serious and irreversible developmental damage such as learning disabilities and behavioral problems, particularly among young children whose bodies are still developing. Most lead poisoning is attributed to lead in paint, dust and soil, and in Rochester lead poisoning has been associated with high risk housing – typically older, rental housing. Housing inspections in the City are triggered in a variety of ways, ranging from routine certificate of occupancy inspections to tenant complaints.

The two years of the CGR study are funded by a \$108,000 grant from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation. Year one highlights:

### **Law is responsible for nearly 1,400 housing units being made lead safe**

- ❖ As a result of the new ordinance, 958 housing units were found to have failed visual inspection and 430 other units failed dust wipe tests. Together, these groups account for 1,388 housing units or about 8% of the 16,450 housing units inspected in the ordinance's initial year. All have been, or should soon be, made lead safe.

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- ❖ Since additional areas of the City will be subject to dust wipe testing in year two (July 2007 – June 2008), “Rochester should expect to see an even bigger overall impact from the new law in its second year,” said Dr. Ruffer.

### **Too early to tell law’s impact on reducing children’s blood lead levels**

A key contribution of the study involves linking the City’s housing inspection data with Monroe County data on EBLs. The CGR project team, including partners from the National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) and the University of Rochester, finds:

- ❖ The number of children with EBLs dropped from about 600 in 2004-05 to 403 during year one of the new law, continuing what is an ongoing downward trend in EBLs for children countywide.
- ❖ Rebecca Morley, NCHH executive director, said, “The initial findings are encouraging. It appears the ordinance is helping to reduce lead poisoning even beyond the trend that would be expected in the absence of an ordinance. Additional data analyzed in the second year of the study will help to corroborate these findings.”

### **Costs for landlords are lower than anticipated**

The study also included a survey that captured the responses of 200 property owners who had two-family housing units inspected under the new ordinance. The survey results indicate that:

- ❖ One-third of the landlords did not spend any money on repairs in preparing for or responding to an inspection, 37% spent between \$1 and \$1,000, and the remaining 30% spent more than \$1,000, with window replacements contributing to higher costs for some landlords.
- ❖ The average cost for repairs for all survey respondents was \$1,726, with the median (or midpoint) about \$300. Excluding those respondents who spent no money on repairs, the average cost for respondents was \$2,618, and the median cost about \$950. “Even the highest cost estimates are well below those forecast prior to implementation of the law,” noted Katrina Korfmacher, project team member from the University of Rochester.
- ❖ Survey respondents were asked about their position on the law when enacted, and at the time of the survey. The proportion that was favorable increased from 41% to 46%.

### **Higher rates of passage than expected**

- ❖ Of the 16,449 City housing units inspected between July 2006 and June 2007, 94% passed interior visual inspections, meaning they did not have visible deteriorated paint on interior surfaces. “This rate of passage is higher than expected based on previously available data,” said Dr. Ruffer. “In the second half of the study, the project team will further examine the high passing rates to determine if the current protocols are effectively identifying lead hazards.”
- ❖ Nearly one-quarter of the inspected units that passed (3,850) were located in NET areas B and F, and were referred for dust wipes. “Of these units 85% passed, which is also higher than expected, when compared with relevant national research findings.”

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**Rochester's Law is of Interest to Cities Across the U.S.**

The findings are of significant interest to leaders in cities across the nation that have lead poisoning prevention ordinances or are working to adopt them. Properties in most areas, including all properties receiving Section 8 tenant-based rental assistance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are considered "safe" if they pass a visual assessment for deteriorated paint. "Rochester's approach is novel since its inspections go beyond looking for peeling paint to also look for dust lead hazards," according to the project study team.

CGR will complete its study by analyzing inspection and EBL data through July 2008. The full report will be available by year-end 2008. For CGR's year one report see [www.cgr.org](http://www.cgr.org).

***Editor's Note:*** Media are invited on Monday, Dec. 10 to come to 165 Gregory Street, a City home where extensive lead has been abated. CGR, the landlord involved and community officials will be available for individual interviews, and video will be allowed inside the home. The event will end promptly at 11 a.m.

See [www.cgr.org](http://www.cgr.org) for the full report.

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