



Sherwin-Williams Lead Paint Facts

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- The “opinion project” published by Cleveland.com and The Plain Dealer presents an incomplete and inaccurate account of Sherwin-Williams history with lead paint.
- Sherwin-Williams was contacted only a few days before publication, and the opinion project ignored the facts and history we provided.
- Sherwin-Williams did not invent lead paint. The market for lead paint existed long before Sherwin-Williams was founded in 1866. Governments nationwide required, and professional painters demanded, lead paint for decades. **Thousands of companies and painters made and promoted lead paint and lead pigments in the 1800s through the mid-1900s.**
- **Sherwin-Williams achieved its success by moving the paint market away from lead** through the development of specialized, ready-to-use paints that largely used different pigments, like zinc, lithopone, and titanium. **Virtually none of Sherwin-Williams paints for interior use ever contained white lead carbonate pigments, and we eliminated lead from our exterior paints several years before it was banned in 1978.**
- Historians acknowledge **no company did more than Sherwin-Williams to develop and promote non-lead paints and pigments.**
- **Sherwin-Williams never had (or hid from the public) secret knowledge about household lead paint risks.** Scientists did not even theorize the risks of lead in household dust from deteriorated lead paint until the mid-1970s, *after* Sherwin-Williams removed lead from all its paints.
- Sherwin-Williams **never** owned a lead mine.
- The opinion project mischaracterizes Sherwin-Williams role in industry marketing. **Our pioneering mass marketing campaign was for Kem-Tone, a lead-free water-based paint** that created the do-it-yourself market.
- Courts uniformly have rejected the claim that the Lead Industries Association acted as our “agent,” and the opinion project discusses Association activities that occurred almost a decade **after** Sherwin-Williams ended its membership.
- Sherwin-Williams always complied with the law. As scientists learned more about risks of lead paint, Sherwin-Williams supported public education efforts and worker training in lead-safe practices. Through our HomeWork program alone, more than 10,000 individuals, including low-income housing residents, former offenders and those experiencing homelessness, have been trained for professional painting careers and lead-safe painting practices.
- Lead paint is only a hazard when it is allowed to deteriorate. Lead hazards can be prevented through enforcement of housing laws. The focus today should be on protecting tenants from bad landlords who collect rent but violate the law and prey on vulnerable tenants by failing to provide safe housing.



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During mid-July 2026, a five-part “opinion project” regarding Sherwin-Williams was published on Cleveland.com, an online news outlet, and in its companion newspaper, The Plain Dealer. It is described as an opinion project for good reason. The narrative about Sherwin-Williams is incomplete and stripped of important historical context, resulting in an inaccurate account of Sherwin-Williams history with lead paint.

The opinion project claims to be based on extensive research into our history, but no one contacted Sherwin-Williams for information until only a few days before publication. We responded quickly, but the opinion project did not acknowledge, publish or include the information we provided – much of which is repeated here.

Sherwin-Williams has a more than century-long history of corporate responsibility and community engagement that continues today. On behalf of the thousands of Sherwin-Williams employees, past and present, who have made our Company what it is today, we write to tell significant parts of our history that were omitted from or misrepresented in the opinion project. This statement does not, however, address all the inaccuracies contained in the opinion project.

THE LEAD PAINT MARKET EXISTED LONG BEFORE SHERWIN-WILLIAMS

When Henry Sherwin founded Sherwin-Williams in Cleveland 160 years ago, the world was very different than it is today. The Civil War was just ending, the primary mode of transportation was horse and buggy, homes didn’t have electricity, and ready-to-use paints in the cans we buy today hardly existed. Instead, painting was done by professional painters who mixed their own custom paints from raw materials. It was extremely common then for paints to contain lead pigments because painters, chemists and government officials believed that lead paint using white lead carbonate pigment was the “gold standard” for quality and performance. **In fact, federal, state and local governments *required* the use of lead paints in residential interiors and public buildings, including schools, through the 1950s and exteriors through the 1970s.**

Responding to this public and government demand, **thousands of companies and painters** made and promoted lead paint and lead pigments. In the late 1880s, more than two dozen of these companies specializing in the manufacture of white lead carbonate pigments banded together to form the National Lead Trust, which dominated the market for white lead pigments. Experts estimate that the National Lead Trust controlled more than 70 percent of the white lead carbonate market, and the company that grew out of the Trust controlled 80-85 percent of that market by 1906. **Sherwin-Williams was never part of the National Lead Trust or the company that grew out of it.**



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SHERWIN-WILLIAMS WAS SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE IT INNOVATED THE MARKET AWAY FROM PURE LEAD PAINTS

Henry Sherwin had a different vision and mission for our Company from the outset – to make the best possible paint for every purpose by creating a diverse array of high-quality, ready-to-use paint products for different applications. **These new ready-to-use paints used non-lead pigments** like zinc and magnesium silicates, and as other new pigments like lithopone and titanium became available, we used them in enormous quantities. For this reason, **many of our paints did not contain lead or contained significantly reduced amounts of lead as compared to pure white lead paints.**

We faced many challenges in selling these new paints because scientists, governments and painters viewed pigments other than pure white lead as inferior. Some states' laws viewed mixed-pigment paints like ours as tainted or "adulterated," because they used pigments other than pure white lead. Sherwin-Williams challenged those "adulteration" laws all the way to the United States Supreme Court, although we were unsuccessful in that legal fight.

Despite the adulteration laws and prevailing demand for lead paint, **Sherwin-Williams moved the entire paint market away from lead pigments** by continuing to introduce paints that reduced or completely eliminated lead. **Virtually none of Sherwin-Williams paints for interior use ever contained white lead carbonate pigments. We also continually innovated to reduce lead in our exterior paints, eliminating it entirely years before it was banned.**

THE OPINION PROJECT CONTAINS MANY INACCURACIES

Sherwin-Williams history is distorted in the opinion project and the accompanying podcast commentary. We do not attempt to address all the omissions and inaccuracies, but a few examples demonstrate how little was done to confirm the "facts" presented.

First, the opinion project wrongfully concludes that "lead paint vaulted Sherwin-Williams to the pinnacle of the paint industry," and "[w]hite lead pigment gave the company its start." **This is wrong.**

It was Sherwin-Williams innovation and ingenuity in manufacturing specialized, ready-to-use paints for specific purposes that propelled our Company to success – NOT one-size-fits-all pure white lead paints. The new, ready-to-use paints that Sherwin-Williams introduced into the paint market used no lead pigments at all or mixed in non-lead pigments so they all had significantly lower amounts of lead than pure white lead paints.



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The opinion project fails to mention that Sherwin-Williams use of non-lead pigments like zinc, lithopone and titanium outstripped, by orders of magnitude, our use of white lead pigments. Even historians hired by plaintiffs in lawsuits filed against Sherwin-Williams acknowledge that **no company did more than Sherwin-Williams to develop and promote non-lead paints and pigments.**

In fact, **Sherwin-Williams first blockbuster product, Kem-Tone, was a non-lead, water-based interior residential paint.** From its introduction in 1941, Kem-Tone outpaced sales of Sherwin-Williams best-selling exterior paint, SWP, many times over. Kem-Tone so dramatically moved the market away from lead paints to a “do-it-yourself” market that it was designated a National Historic Chemical Landmark.¹

Second, Sherwin-Williams **never owned** a “huge lead mine in New Mexico.” From 1904 through 1943, Sherwin-Williams had an interest in a **zinc** mine in New Mexico through the Ozark Zinc Oxide Company at Joplin, Missouri to support its production of zinc oxide pigment.

Third, Sherwin-Williams **never had unique knowledge or concealed from the public any medical or scientific information on the risks of lead.** Sherwin-Williams did not set out to move the market away from lead paint because it held special knowledge about its potential risks to people living in homes. The opinion project makes two bold misstatements: that Sherwin-Williams knew lead paint was toxic but Americans did not, and that the Company “did their best to hide it from the American public.” This is completely false, and even the expert historians hired by plaintiffs in litigation have acknowledged this under oath.

Lead’s toxicity has been known and reported since ancient Greek and Roman times. It is shocking today, but lead was intentionally added to many products in the 1800s and early 1900s, including some medicines, nipple shields for breastfeeding, cosmetics and hair dye, to name a few. American magazines and newspapers, including the Plain Dealer – the very paper that published the opinion project – widely reported on lead’s toxicity in hundreds of articles.²

Knowledge and science about the risks of deteriorated lead paint evolved over time. When Henry Sherwin set out to make the best possible paints more than 160 years ago, neither he nor anyone else knew of the risks of low levels of lead in common household dust from deteriorated paint. The health effects of lead without visible physical symptoms were not recognized or known. No test to measure lead in blood existed until the late 1930s, and it was available only in three laboratories as of the 1950s. In the 1960s, blood lead levels below 60 µg/dl were thought to be normal. Today, the median level is 0.6 µg/dl.

¹ See Am. Chemical Soc., *Waterborne Interior Paint: Kem-Tone Wall Finish*, <https://www.acs.org/education/whatischemistry/landmarks/kem-tone.html>.

² “Poisonous Water Pipes,” Weekly Plain Dealer, Dec. 2, 1857; “Hundreds of Persons Poisoned with Lead Ground up with Flour,” Weekly Plain Dealer, June 13, 1866; “Metals Kill Workers; Lead is Deadliest,” The Plain Dealer, Oct. 1, 1905; “Lead Poisoning,” The Plain Dealer, June 17, 1918.



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In the mid-1970s, after Sherwin-Williams had removed lead from all its paints, scientific studies first began piecing together that lead dust from deteriorated and ill-maintained lead paint was a potentially harmful exposure pathway. Scientific consensus on that pathway was not reached until the 1980s. In fact, a plaintiff expert who is the Chief Scientist/Research Director for the National Center for Healthy Housing confirmed in a recently published book, “The identification of lead dust by the newer studies in the 1980s could be described as a ‘Eureka!!’ moment in the history of childhood lead poisoning.”

Fourth, the opinion project wrongfully concludes that we knew about the dangers of lead paint because we published an article in 1904 for employees under the headline “Dangers of White Lead.” That is plain wrong and directly contradicts admissions by plaintiffs’ experts and the historical record.

The opinion project fails to disclose that the findings regarding white lead reported in that article were based on bad science, and the article was disputed and quickly proven wrong. The reported faulty theory was that lead could escape into air through paint fumes as paint dried. Scientists conclusively proved, however, that aldehydes, not lead, caused strong odors in paint fumes and were responsible for the reported headaches and nausea. Even plaintiffs’ experts in litigation have admitted that the scientific theory behind the 1904 article was wrong. Thus, the article did not inform Sherwin-Williams, or anyone else, of risks to “inhabitants of a house painted with lead colors,” because the whole basis of the article was invalid. And it has nothing to do with the risks of today – lead in household dust from deteriorated paint.

The opinion project also fails to mention that this 1904 article wasn’t just printed by Sherwin-Williams for employees before it was disproved. Sherwin-Williams also distributed it outside of the Company, and the same article also was printed by newspapers across the country.

Fifth, the opinion project falsely claims that the 1900 Chameleon article demonstrates that Sherwin-Williams “knew” of risks to children inside houses from tiny amounts of lead in dust from chalking. Sherwin-Williams began making mixed-pigment SWP brand paint in 1880. We always were transparent in customer brochures that SWP used a mix of pigments, only one of which was lead. We explained to customers in those brochures that we added zinc to counteract the softness of white lead, which reduced something called “chalking.” Chalking is when small particles of pigment are released from a painted surface due to the breakdown of the paint’s binder over time. Prolonged exposure to sunlight, rain and high humidity contribute to chalking. As a result, it was viewed as an exterior paint issue. As the brochures noted, chalking was “no secret.” In fact, paint chemists and professional painters alike viewed a small amount of chalking as a good thing, because it left the surface in better condition for repainting.



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The 1900 Chameleon article explains how mixing zinc and lead together counteracts excessive chalking and results in a lower lead content in the paint. Also, as the article says, it was “familiarily [widely] known” that lead could be poisonous if ingested. At the time though, no one thought people were ingesting lead from painted surfaces inside their homes. The concern was for painters who got lead paint on hands, faces and beards from working with it day in and out. So, the 1900 Chameleon article had nothing to do with risks of tiny amounts of lead making their way into household dust from deteriorated paint. To claim otherwise distorts the Chameleon article and rips it from its historical context.

Sixth, the opinion project falsely states that in 1904, “[a] Queensland, Australia, doctor wrote an article blaming lead paint on woodwork inside homes for a rash of poisoning cases.” That article, along with later scientific articles by the same author (and others), explained that because Queensland is semi-tropical, the sun was so hot that exterior paint – not interior paint – turned to powder. The Australian scientists described the “special conditions” of the environment in Queensland, as compared to other parts of Australia, which is why Australia did not ban the use of lead paint at the time. Instead, Australia restricted lead in **exterior** (not interior) paint that was applied within reach of children – and it did not do that until 1922.

Also, global communication was very different in the early 1900s. The Australian research was not published in any American newspapers, and there is no evidence that Sherwin-Williams was aware of **these studies from the opposite side of the world**.

Seventh, the opinion project claims that Sherwin-Williams “pioneered mass marketing” and marketed in ways no one had marketed before. **The opinion project leaves out the critical context: the advertising campaign that was the largest of its kind for any paint company at the time was for Kem-Tone, Sherwin-Williams lead-free, water-based paint that created the do-it-yourself market.** Before the Kem-Tone campaign, our advertising was like the advertising of many other paint companies at the time.

Eighth, Sherwin-Williams “Painting Guide” pictured in the opinion project did not recommend SWP for furniture. It recommended Enameloid and Old Dutch Enamel paints for furniture, both of which were made from zinc oxide, not white lead.

Ninth, the opinion project claims that, in 1909, some countries outright banned lead paint inside buildings because lead paint was a poison that was harming people. But experts agree that the restrictions were motivated by occupational concerns for workers and painters who were regularly exposed to large amounts of lead and exhibited physical symptoms, **not** for concerns related to children living in houses. It was the International *Labor* Organization, after all, that proposed the restrictions. Most countries, believing painters could manage the risks, chose not to ban the use of white lead, including the U.S., Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and about half of the European countries.



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Tenth, the opinion project wrongfully claims that the Lead Industries Association acted as the “agent” of Sherwin-Williams. Every court to consider this has rejected that claim. The opinion project also discusses things the Association did almost a decade **after** Sherwin-Williams ended its membership. The opinion project also fails to mention that even when Sherwin-Williams was a member, it was in a lower-tier membership category, minimally participated and outright refused to support or participate in the Association’s White Lead Promotion Campaign.

Eleventh, the opinion project and podcast wrongfully imply that the Rhode Island Supreme Court wanted to hold Sherwin-Williams liable for lead paint abatement, but was forced to overturn the trial court verdict due to a legal “technicality.” The fact is that the Rhode Island Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the case “should have been dismissed at the outset,” that Sherwin-Williams was **not liable** for any public nuisance and that “the state has not and cannot allege any set of facts to support its public nuisance claim.”

The fact is that Sherwin-Williams consistently has won lawsuits asserting claims related to lead paint. Time and again, courts across the country have thrown out public nuisance lawsuits by government entities and school districts,³ as well as class actions⁴ and personal injury claims.⁵ **Sherwin-Williams has never lost a case applying risk contribution theory** – a jury reached a unanimous verdict in Sherwin-Williams favor in one case, and the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals twice ruled in Sherwin-Williams favor requiring dismissal of five other cases.⁶ Dozens of state and federal court decisions, each applying their own law to our facts, aren’t wrong.

³ See, e.g., *Atl. Richfield Co. v. Cnty. of Montgomery*, 294 A.3d 1274 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2023); *State of Rhode Island v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc.*, 951 A.2d 428 (R.I. 2008); *In re Lead Paint Litig.*, 924 A.2d 484 (N.J. 2007); *City of St. Louis v. Benjamin Moore & Co.*, 226 S.W.3d 110 (Mo. 2007); *City of Chicago v. Am. Cyanamid Co.*, 823 N.E.2d 126 (Ill. App. Ct. 2005); *Harris Cnty. v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc., et al.*, No. 2001-21413, Order (215th Tex. Dist. Ct. May 27, 2005); *Quitman Cnty. Sch. Dist. v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc., et al.*, No. 2:02-CV-00004, Order of Dismissal, Dkt. No. 165 (N.D. Miss. Aug. 21, 2003); *Jefferson Cnty. Sch. Dist. v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc., et al.*, No. 5:01-CV-211BN, Order, Dkt. No. 165 (S.D. Miss. Nov. 15, 2002).

⁴ See, e.g., *Lewis v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc.*, 793 N.E.2d 869 (Ill. App. Ct. 2003); *Cofield v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc.*, No. Civ.A. MJG-99-3277, 2000 WL 34292681 (D. Md. Aug. 17, 2000); *German v. Fed. Home Loan Mortg. Corp.*, No. 93 CIV. 6941 (MBM), 1998 WL 812478 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 16, 1998); *Jefferson v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc.*, 106 F.3d 1245 (5th Cir. 1997); *City of Phila. v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc.*, 994 F.2d 112 (3d Cir. 1993); *Swartzbauer v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc.*, 794 F. Supp. 142 (E.D. Pa. 1992); *Hurt v. Phila. Hous. Auth.*, 806 F. Supp. 515 (E.D. Pa. 1992).

⁵ See, e.g., *Cannon v. Armstrong Containers Inc.*, 92 F.4th 688 (7th Cir. 2024) (170 plaintiffs); *Burton v. Am. Cyanamid Co.*, 588 F. Supp. 3d 890, 910 (E.D. Wis. 2022) (3 plaintiffs); *Sherwin-Williams Co. v. Gaines ex rel. Pollard*, 75 So. 3d 41 (Miss. 2011); *Thomas ex rel. Gramling v. Mallett*, 795 N.W.2d 62 (Wis. Ct. App. 2010); *Godoy ex rel. Gramling v. E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co.*, 768 N.W.2d 674 (Wis. 2009) (after this victory in the Wisconsin Supreme Court on design defect and other theories, plaintiff voluntarily dismissed the case); *Jackson v. Glidden Co.*, No. 87779, 2007 WL 184662 (Ohio Ct. App. Jan. 25, 2007); *Smith v. Lead Indust. Ass’n, Inc.*, No. 24-C-99-004490, 2003 WL 25437647 (Md. Cir. Ct. 2003); *Brenner v. Am. Cyanamid Co.*, 288 A.D.2d 869 (N.Y. App. Div. 2001); *Sabater ex rel. Santana v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc.*, 704 N.Y.S.2d 800 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 2000) (4 plaintiffs); *Wright v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc.*, No. 1896 Sept Term 1996, 1997 WL 34717752 (Md. Ct. App. Oct. 21, 1997); *Skipworth by Williams v. Lead Indus. Ass’n, Inc.*, 690 A.2d 169 (Pa. 1997); *Santiago v. Sherwin-Williams Co.*, 794 F. Supp. 29 (D. Mass. 1992), *aff’d*, 3 F.3d 546 (1st Cir. 1993).

⁶ A verdict for 3 plaintiffs in 2019 was overturned because a federal appeals court found the case never should



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SHERWIN-WILLIAMS ACTED APPROPRIATELY AND LAWFULLY AS KNOWLEDGE EVOLVED

Sherwin-Williams made a legal product demanded by the market, before anyone knew about risks of lead in household dust from deteriorated paint. As knowledge evolved, Sherwin-Williams took appropriate action, adding voluntary warning labels to prevent the use of exterior paints on interior surfaces and removing all lead from the remaining exterior paints that contained it years ahead of federal requirements. Decades after Sherwin-Williams stopped making any residential paints with lead, we continue to regularly support efforts to inform the public of the risks of lead paint.

Once again, the opinion project omits significant information that was provided by the Company before its publication. Beginning in the early 1990s, Sherwin-Williams voluntarily put warning information in store pamphlets, many millions of which were distributed to customers. In the 2000s, we voluntarily put warning information on non-lead product labels. We also cooperated with the federal government to distribute EPA lead pamphlets, and with State Attorneys General to implement industry-wide warnings about lead dust through warning stickers, product label warnings and warnings on stir sticks, hundreds of millions of which have been distributed through our stores nationwide.

SHERWIN-WILLIAMS PROUDLY GIVES BACK TO THE COMMUNITIES IT SERVES

Sherwin-Williams proudly supports non-governmental organizations to facilitate lead-safe public education and remediation programs, but once again, the opinion project did not include or acknowledge this. Sherwin-Williams HomeWork program is a painter-training program that offers individuals, including low-income housing residents, former offenders and those experiencing homelessness, the opportunity to learn the basic skills necessary for a career in professional painting.⁷ Over the course of the 20+ year history of HomeWork, roughly 10,000 students across 30 cities in the U.S. have been trained in lead-safe painting practices, and nearly 70 percent of students were hired by local housing authorities, painting contractors, construction companies and other industries requiring professional painters.

have proceeded to trial in the first place. See *Burton v. E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co.*, 994 F.3d 791 (7th Cir. 2021).

⁷ See, e.g., *Sherwin-Williams helps public housing residents paint a path to self-sufficiency* (Jun. 20, 2013), https://www.cleveland.com/business/2013/06/sherwin-williams_helps_public.html.



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Today, Sherwin-Williams long-standing commitment to giving back extends around the world, but Cleveland is our home. Our efforts locally include Sherwin-Williams support of the Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition (LSCC), a public-private partnership formed in 2019 to address the issue of lead poisoning in the Cleveland community.⁸ Through the LSCC, from 2021 to 2025, Sherwin-Williams provided:

- 25 HomeWork classes that afforded training to 385 participants in lead-safe work practices;
- \$1 million to United Way of Greater Cleveland's Healthy Homes Initiative to fund subgrants to (1) the CHN Housing Partners for grants to property owners in Cleveland seeking to remediate or isolate potential lead hazards in their properties in concert with the LSCC's Lead Safe Home Fund and (2) the Legal Aid Society to assist Legal Aid Society clients with ensuring that residential landlords, owners, and other parties in control of residential rental units comply with applicable lead-safe laws;
- \$750,000 to MetroHealth's Pediatric Lead Clinic, which works to educate parents and ensure that all children in Greater Cleveland have a lead test before age 3;
- An additional \$625,000 to CHN Housing Partners, over and above the grants through the United Way mentioned above, to provide loans to property owners for lead-safe repairs;
- \$75,000 to the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Right to Counsel Program, in addition to the grants provided through our United Way contribution noted above;
- \$50,000 for book gifting programs through the Literacy Cooperative (affiliated with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library) and Reach Out & Read's Family Intervention Program to boost early literacy and support early brain development in child populations disproportionately impacted by lead; and
- Nearly \$400,000 in discounted paints and sundries to the LSCC program.

It is important to note that our support of many of these programs and organizations pre-dated the formation of the LSCC and will continue in the future.

⁸ To learn more about the LSCC: [Lead Poisoning Prevention | Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition](#). In January 2026, it was reported that more than 28,000 rental units in Cleveland have gone through the process of obtaining a lead-safe certificate. The opinion project describes the LSCC as "a disaster of people that are all looking out for their own interests" and goes on to state that "[w]e need to get that [referring to the LSCC] out of here." (July 17, 2026 Podcast - [A conversation about Our Sherwin-Williams Dilemma: Today in Ohio - cleveland.com](#)).



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Sherwin-Williams also has supported a new facility and mobile imaging unit at University Hospitals to improve health outcomes, specifically for underserved women and babies; is a significant founding funder of Say Yes to Education Cleveland, an innovative program that provides wraparound support for student and family success, and offers all graduating Cleveland Metropolitan School District seniors a path to attaining a post-secondary credential; and supported MetroHealth many years before the LSCC partnership. Most recently, Sherwin-Williams has partnered with the LeBron James Family Foundation to launch its Promise Project, aimed at supporting first-time home buyers in Akron. These are just **some recent examples** of the many ways we give back to Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, in addition to our thousands of Northeast Ohio employees who give back to their communities on an ongoing basis.

REQUIRING LANDLORDS TO COMPLY WITH TODAY'S LAWS **REDUCES LEAD HAZARDS**

Over the past several decades, great strides have been made in reducing childhood blood lead levels,⁹ but more work remains. It is important to know that lead paint itself is not a hazard. As the federal government recognizes, lead paint “if properly managed and maintained, poses little risk.”¹⁰ It is only when lead paint is allowed to deteriorate that it becomes a hazard.¹¹ Lead paint hazards can be prevented through routine property cleaning and maintenance, including regular mopping, repainting in recommended intervals and repairing any deteriorated paint using lead-safe work practices. **This is why the proper maintenance of residences and schools is legally required and essential to ensuring the safety of the people inside them, as public officials and laws across the country, including Ohio, recognize.**¹²

The focus today should be on protecting against predatory landlords who subject vulnerable families to substandard housing conditions. Those conditions are not limited to deteriorating paint – they include unsafe electrical systems, faulty plumbing, structural hazards, mold, vermin and criminal activity. Many cities, including our own, have documented the plight of tenants whose landlords fail to comply with safe housing laws.¹³

⁹ The average blood lead level for children under six in the mid-1970s was just under 15ug/dl. Today, 97.5% of children have blood lead levels below 3.5 ug/dl.

¹⁰ See, e.g., U.S. EPA, *Is my home unsafe if it contains lead-based paint?* (Oct. 29, 2024), <https://www.epa.gov/lead/my-home-unsafe-if-it-contains-lead-based-paint>.

¹¹ See, e.g., U.S. EPA, *Protect Your Family From Lead in Your Home*, (Mar. 2021), <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/documents/lead-in-your-home-portal-color-2020-508.pdf> (“Generally, lead-based paint that is in good condition is not a hazard.”).

¹² See, e.g., Ohio Revised Code § 3742.

¹³ See, e.g., Cleveland Plain Dealer Series “Toxic Neglect,” (2015-2017) https://www.cleveland.com/metro/page/toxic_neglect_clevelands_legac.html; Lexington Herald-Leader, “Misery for Rent” (Aug. 27, 2000); Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Series “Landlord Games,” (2016-2018), <https://projects.jsonline.com/topics/landlord-games/index.html>; “Deadly fires, broken promises,” Chicago Tribune (April 26,



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Casting blame on the original builders, plumbers, electricians and manufacturers, like Sherwin-Williams, that complied with the laws of their time more than a half century ago, gives a pass to landlords who collect rent, fail to maintain their properties and violate the laws of today. That is why government agencies broadly recognize that regulatory action and consistent enforcement of existing housing laws and tenant protections are the most effective way to combat ongoing childhood lead exposure.¹⁴

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We think it is important to look at history in context and get the facts right – facts like the acknowledgment of expert historians that **Sherwin-Williams did not hide any information about lead from the government or the public and that no company did more than Sherwin-Williams to develop and promote non-lead paints and pigments.** Because the opinion project was missing important information like this, we are compelled to correct the record.

Sherwin-Williams was founded at a time when lead paint was the “gold standard.” We distinguished ourselves by continually innovating, providing quality products and moving the industry toward reduced-lead and no-lead paints. Today, our 64,000+ employees continue Henry Sherwin’s mission of innovation, quality and giving back to Cleveland and the many other communities we serve around the world.

2021); “From study on asthma, a hint of racial bias: Researchers say Boston unequal in how it deals with housing violations,” Boston Globe (April 22, 2022).

¹⁴ Lead hazards can be prevented by following housing codes that require proper maintenance of lead paint. See, e.g., U.S. EPA, *Enforcing Lead Laws and Regulations* (Nov. 6, 2025), <https://www.epa.gov/enforcement/enforcing-lead-laws-and-regulations>; National Center for Healthy Housing, *State and Local Lead Laws* (2026), <https://nchh.org/information-and-evidence/healthy-housing-policy/state-and-local/lead-laws/>. The opinion project instead would give a pass to bad landlords who break the law and suggests that federal requirements for abating lead hazards can be waived or disregarded (July 17, 2026 Podcast - [A conversation about Our Sherwin-Williams Dilemma: Today in Ohio - cleveland.com](#)).