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## More Urgency Needed to Fix Lead-Based Paint Hazards in D.C.

*Auditor recognizes DCHA's funding challenges and found that DOEE is responsive to complaints when hazards are identified but the process needs improvement*

**WASHINGTON, November 18, 2020**—A report by the Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA) raises significant concerns about the safety of residents in public housing from lead-based paint exposure, including poor execution by the D.C. Housing Authority to eliminate lead hazards identified by mandatory lead risk-assessments.

“The District has strong and protective policies to mitigate lead-poisoning, but enforcement has to improve,” said D.C. Auditor Kathy Patterson. “DCHA must live up to its mandate and we need to strengthen the Department of Energy and Environment’s authority to find and fix the dangers.”

ODCA found that as recently as October 2017, the D.C. Housing Authority (DCHA) did not know the location of lead-based paint with certainty in public housing despite 96% of their properties being constructed before 1978 and federal law having required risk assessments to determine this by March 2002.

The audit also found that DCHA failed to promptly remediate lead hazards in a sample of units with children under age six who are particularly at risk, suggesting that DCHA has not undertaken prompt, adequate lead remediation throughout the wider, unsampled public housing units.

ODCA also found that DCHA failed to conduct annual inspections as required, which is particularly worrisome given that the units in general are in extremely poor condition. And DCHA failed to promptly resolve or keep adequate records of work orders involving lead-based paint in public housing units in half of the work orders ODCA reviewed.

“We recognize that DCHA has a challenging job and funding for public housing has been declining, but a strong and prompt enforcement process is key to protecting residents’ health,” the Auditor said.

The report recommends that DCHA enforce the Lead Safe Housing Rule and the Lead Hazard Prevention and Elimination Act, including:

- Develop a plan to remediate remaining lead hazards identified during 2018 risk assessments.
- Stabilize any reported deteriorated lead-based paint within 30 days.
- Conduct visual assessments for deteriorated paint every 12 months.
- Provide tenants at risk with a clearance report issued within the previous 12 months.

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ODCA also found that DOEE's Lead-Safe and Healthy Homes Division could improve its enforcement process, including:

- Request action to clarify the law to start enforcing lead remediation in public housing.
- Establish internal deadlines for each step of the enforcement process to reduce delays.
- Enforce deadlines for requesting extensions.
- Use authority to remediate lead hazards and issue liens, deny permits, issue multiday fines, and collaborate with other agencies as needed when an owner does not comply.

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