

FACT SHEET HOUSE and GARDEN

Unknown to people are the often alarmingly high levels of soil contamination around a standard residential house.

Lead paint was phased out quite late in New Zealand and was still in use for outside painting in the early 80-ies. Many DIY people will have used it long after that. Due to sanding, chipping and natural corrosion of the paint a strip up to 5 meters wide can have lead levels 2 – 10 times higher than the guideline level for residential soils.



Many houses are built in areas which were orchards in the past. Only from 2002 attention was given to contamination issues associated with horticultural land. Before that no remediation took place during subdivisions and as a worst case scenario, the spray shed area might be in your back garden.

Glasshouse areas, often containing high lead and pesticide / herbicide levels were also converted into residential lots without attention to contaminant issues. On lifestyle blocks subdivisions from a larger farm can contain the old sheep-dip or farm-tip sites (see separate fact sheets) especially as these subdivisions tend to be in areas with good road access.

Remediation of residential sections is problematic given the size and the presence of an established garden. Careful identification of contaminated areas in relation to their usage and risk posed to inhabitants (particularly children) helps in determining what measures are most effective. Removal of all top-soil (see above) is the last resort.

Alternative solutions are: new topsoil cover or planting up contaminated areas with thorny scrubs (roses) discourages children playing there.

Measures against moving the outside dust into the house, good quality door mats or adequate size which are regularly cleaned.

Note that older houses also often contain lead paint on the inside and DDT in the attic! Care is required not to underestimate the effects of 'near house' contamination.

Please note:

If you have any doubt about the presence of a potential contamination in and around your house, use the free question service on this website to get more information specific to your situation.

Main contaminants on residential lots:

Around old house	Lead (pre'80-ies houses)
Near house, shed	Zinc, herbicides, PAH from tar (pitch) repairs to roof, coal/wood ash in flower beds (PAH)
Incinerator area	extreme concentration heavy metals (> 15% arsenic, > 15% chromium, >10% copper), PAH, often also dioxins from burning plastics
Ashes in veggie garden	PAH and sometimes arsenic, chromium, copper
Garden paths (<60-ies)	Coal tar 'tarmac' path with very high PAH levels
If old horticultural	arsenic, lead, DDT / OCP – ONP's
Sheep-dip/woolshed	arsenic, dieldrin, DDT, other pesticides

Note often all these are also present in house dust