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The Safe Use of Paint Strippers

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# IT'S YOUR HEALTH

## The Safe Use of Paint Strippers

### The Issue

Paint strippers are handy for home renovations. However, they contain chemicals that can harm your health if not used properly.

### Background

When it comes to removing old paint, paint strippers are fast acting, versatile and easy to use. Compared to sanding, which produces a lot of dust, paint strippers are one of the best and least harmful ways to remove [lead-based paint](#). However, paint strippers contain potentially harmful chemicals, the most common one being [methylene chloride](#), also known as dichloromethane. It is important to take the proper safety precautions for the specific product you are using, so read the product label carefully before each use and follow the manufacturer's instructions.



### The Risks of Paint Strippers

Health Canada considers methylene chloride to be "harmful" to human health. When exposed over a long period of time to high levels of this chemical, lab animals developed cancer. Scientists believe that prolonged exposure to methylene chloride could cause cancer in humans as well. For that reason, you should [limit your exposure](#) to this chemical.

Methylene chloride is clear, colourless and has a mildly sweet odour. It can cause irritation if it gets on your skin. Breathing in the vapours over short periods can cause sluggishness, irritability, light-headedness, nausea and headaches.

### Minimizing Your Risk

Using paint strippers indoors will contaminate the air, putting people inside at risk. To reduce the risk to yourself and others, move the object you are stripping outdoors if possible. Here



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are some other suggestions for reducing your risk:

- Before starting, turn the furnace fan off; tape over the air supply and return registers; and open windows in the room where you are working.
- Make sure your work area is well ventilated. Place an electric fan by an open window to blow the contaminated air outside.
- Always wear [goggles, gloves and protective clothing](#).

- Wear a good quality breathing mask made for use with organic chemicals: these can be bought at a paint store or safety equipment outlet.



- If you are removing lead-based paint, keep a pair of coveralls and work shoes to wear only in the work area and wash all work clothes separately from other clothing. This will prevent [lead-contaminated paint dust](#) and stripper-soaked scrapings from being spread around the house.
- If you get paint stripper on your skin or in your eyes, wash it off right away.
- If you develop breathing problems, dizziness, nausea or headaches while working with paint strippers, get some fresh air immediately. Better yet, work for ten minutes at a time and then take a fresh air break.



- Never eat, drink or smoke while removing paint.
- Keep anything that might cause a spark or static electricity out of the work area.
- Consider hiring a professional if you do not want to be exposed to the hazards of paint strippers.

## Health Canada's Role

[Health Canada](#) works with industry and the public to help prevent product-related injuries and to promote safety and the responsible use of household products. Health Canada:

- Conducts research on [potential hazards](#) associated with [consumer products](#);
- Raises awareness of potential risks of injury through our [product safety advisories](#), warnings and recalls;
- Develops and enforces product safety regulations and standards; and
- Provides channels for [reporting product-related injuries](#), deaths, and safety-related issues with consumer products.

## Need More Info?

For further information, check these references:

- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), [Advice on the Use of Chemical Strippers to Remove Leaded Paint](#) at: [www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/publications/en/rh-pr/tech/92-202.pdf](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/publications/en/rh-pr/tech/92-202.pdf) or contact: CMHC Publications  
Tel: 1-800-668-2642  
or 1-613-748-2003
- *Ku' qwt 'J gcnj* – [Lead-based Paint](#) at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/prod/paint-peinture-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/prod/paint-peinture-eng.php)
- *Ku' qwt 'J gcnj* - [Lead and Human Health](#) at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/enviro/lead-plomb-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/enviro/lead-plomb-eng.php)
- For more information on home decor safety, visit Health Canada's [Furniture, Décor and Garden](#) section at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/house-domes/decor/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/house-domes/decor/index-eng.php)
- Government of Canada's [Chemical Substances](#) website at: <http://www.chemicalsubstanceschimiques.gc.ca/index-eng.php>

For safety information about food, health and consumer products visit the *J gcnj { 'Ecpcf kpu* website at: [www.healthy Canadians.gc.ca](http://www.healthy Canadians.gc.ca)

For more articles on health and safety issues go to the *Ku' qwt 'J gcnj* web section at: [www.health.gc.ca/iyh](http://www.health.gc.ca/iyh)

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709  
or TTY at 1-800-267-1245\*