

ELSIA Risk Management Policy Industry Code of Practice

Lead sheet installed as a building or construction product presents negligible risk to the public is the conclusion of the voluntary risk assessment report (VRAR) carried out by the lead sheet industry. Wherever potential risks exist, they can be eliminated by adoption of the industry standard Code of Practice.

Risk Assessment

A comprehensive EU study has been undertaken to identify what, if any, are the risks that the use of lead sheet presents to the environment and to the public. This assessment has recently been reviewed by EU Member States as well as the EU Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCHER).

The conclusions of the VRAR to date regarding lead sheet are that potential threats to human health come only from instances where individuals can come into physical contact with lead. In each of these instances the industry has a code of standard practice that, if followed properly, eliminates all risk.

Contact with lead

Lead can only be absorbed into the body by ingestion or inhalation; it is not absorbed through the pores of the skin. The amount of lead picked up on the skin through direct contact with lead sheet has been shown to be very small. Ill health resulting from excessive exposure – a very rare event – is only possible in unusual situations where an individual fails to wash his/her hands after being in contact with lead before eating, drinking or smoking. Even then, it can only incur after extended contact with lead, and in most cases after additional exposure to lead from other sources.

Risk management – Code of Practice

The instances identified by the VRAR where individuals may come into physical contact with lead are threefold: balconies, rain water/soak-aways, and lead sheet fitted at low levels. To avoid any possibility of undue exposure the following code of practice is recommended by the industry to eliminate all risk.

1. Balconies
Fit permanent wooden or plastic duckboards on top of the surface of balconies to prevent any direct hand contact with the lead sheet below.
2. Rain water/soak-aways
Fit gutters to direct all rain water into a downpipe and drainage system. In unusual circumstances (for example in historic buildings) where it is not possible to fit gutters, or where rain water is directed into an exposed soak-away, fit fencing to prevent human contact with soil below the drip-line or with stones/gravel in the soak-away.

3. Lead sheet fitted at low levels (conservatories, verandas, window-sills, etc.)
Coat all exposed surfaces with two coats of patination oil (available from your lead sheet supplier) or a clear matt finish lacquer or varnish. This treatment may have to be repeated from time to time to repair any damage or erosion. Lead sheet pre-treated with a lacquer coating is also available from lead sheet manufacturers.

Rainwater harvesting

One issue not identified as a potential risk by the voluntary risk assessment, but which attracts occasional questions, is rainwater harvesting. Rainwater collection and storage systems are becoming increasingly widespread as a result of growing public awareness of the importance of water resource conservation. Water collected from a lead roof or gutter system presents no risk to public health providing it is used for flushing toilets only. Rainwater harvested from any roof area will not be suitable for drinking water due to the risk of pollution from local atmospheric conditions as well as from all types of roofing material. If an overflow soak-away has been installed as part of the rainwater harvesting system it should be covered to ensure that drainage is to an inaccessible buried cavity.

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About ELSIA:

The European Lead Sheet Industry Association (ELSIA) is the central trade association of the European lead sheet manufacturing industry. All members work to an established EN standard that guarantees the highest level of product quality. ELSIA is committed to funding long-term research and development to ensure that its products are environmentally sound. The members take a modern, responsible attitude to the health and safety of stakeholders and the environment. The website www.elsia.eu is a comprehensive resource for all information about lead sheet: history, specifics, applications and environmental aspects.