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# FACTS ABOUT LEAD IN RESIDENTIAL SOIL

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Rico, Colorado

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Soil samples collected by the Environmental Protection Agency this fall identified high levels of lead in the yards of some homes in Rico.

This fact sheet answers questions residents may have about exposure to lead.

If you have additional questions about lead risks, please contact the following experts:

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## How can I come in contact with lead?

Lead is a common, naturally-occurring metal used in many aspects of our daily lives. It was once used as an additive in gasoline, in household plumbing, and in paint. Government regulations try to reduce our exposure to lead from such products because lead can pose a health threat, especially to children.

People may come in contact with high concentrations of lead in neighborhoods where industrial activity contributed metals to the soil. In some areas high concentrations of lead are naturally-occurring in the rocks and soil. In areas like Rico where mining, milling and smelting of metals took place, mine wastes containing high levels of lead may spread into yards. Exposure happens when residents:

- swallow contaminated soil, dust, or vegetables grown in contaminated soil, or
- breathe in air containing contaminated dust inside or outside the home.

You may accidentally swallow soil and dust while smoking or eating with unwashed hands. Young children are even more likely to accidentally swallow lead contaminated dust or soil because they place dusty fingers and toys in their mouth. Children come in contact with lead in soil when playing in their yards, touching pets who may bring dirt in from outside, or eating unwashed vegetables from home gardens.

Garden soil usually contains lower levels of metals than the surrounding yard. Application of compost and other soil additives tends to decrease the level of metals in soil and decrease plant uptake of metals from soil.

In areas, like Rico, where there is snow covering the ground during the winter, exposure is less likely during those months.