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# Weaving LRRP into Your Sales Process



*Eliminate the fear to secure pre-1978 work*

By Morgan Zenner

Selling jobs in this market is tough enough. With the Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting (LRRP) rule added to the mix, things have become tougher.

Truth is, more and more members are finding out that this doesn't have to be the reality. Here are three different approaches to handling a potential client whose house must comply with LRRP and why these methods work.

## The simplifier

The LRRP rule in Jeffrey Huber's mind is very simple. "The law is the law," says this managing member of Reed

Construction LLC in Greenwich, Conn. His no-nonsense approach keeps his company safe from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"I got certified from the very beginning when the regulation was introduced—I don't make it a big deal," Huber says.

He also doesn't make it a big deal when he talks to clients. In fact, from the very first phone call, he questions homeowners about the age of their home. If the client's home was built before 1978, he will immediately mention LRRP. Huber believes being the first to bring it up to a client positions him as a more knowledgeable and professional remodeler.

"I would say seven out of 10 times, the contractor before





me never mentioned LRRP, and homeowners are surprised to hear about it from me—or more important, not hear about it from the other contractor. That's when I know they are going to choose me," Huber says.

Occasionally, if the homeowner doesn't know when their home was built, Huber will still discuss lead and then go so far as to look up the property listing to find out the age of the home before their next meeting.

Huber requires his clients have their homes tested by a third-party professional testing service; an expense they must cover. "I tell them that I don't allow for people not to have homes tested," Huber says. "They have no choice [if they want to work with me] because I won't run the risk of getting audited one day."

Huber prefers to test the home rather than assume there is lead there solely based on the age of the home. He believes the added costs and labor should apply only to those projects that have proven the existence of lead. If the lead test is negative, and Huber doesn't use lead-safe work practices outlined in LRRP, the test will protect his company if he ever were to be audited.

When talking about additional costs of lead-safe practices, Huber ties it into the homeowner's contingency fund.

"I always advise homeowners to set aside 10 to 15 percent of their remodeling budgets as the 'what-if' money," he says. "There's no X-ray vision to know what unforeseen expenses might come up, and I classify lead as one of these expenses."

Still, he doesn't hide the cost—it is its own line item in the budget—but Huber's approach makes homeowners feel like it's a necessary part of the remodeling process.

What also sets Huber apart from other contractors is the way he handles resistance. He mentions liability and the consequences of a potential audit if clients are against the lead testing or if they don't want to follow the rule.

Because Huber takes consequences associated with evading the rule very seriously, homeowners who easily disregard the consequences—whether health-related or legal—cast a new light on themselves as to whether they are the kind of clients that he wants.

He associates refusal to abide by the LRRP rule as a red flag because those same people are more likely to exhibit negative reasoning patterns later on in the job. "My standpoint is, I'm absolutely better off with not working with that kind of client," Huber says.

## Using expertise as opportunity

Being on the good side of a specialized environmental regulation involving the remodeling industry is a good place to be for Bill Christie, president of Johnson County Siding & Window Co. Inc., based in Olathe, Kan.

Or that's one way to spin it. When he's talking to consumers who are uninformed of LRRP, he sees an opportunity in providing a specialized expertise in the subject of lead, something most of the people he talks to know nothing about.

He has placed all of his sales staff through training so they talk intelligently about LRRP, answering any question a homeowner might have.

"I think they appreciate the professionalism and the credentials that we bring to the project—most people are happy to comply," Christie says.



But Huber admits it's not very often that it comes down to this. He does not shy away from pre-1978 work because he says most people are very receptive to following the law. By providing thorough and meaningful explanations, he is able to overcome most resistance or misconceptions they may have and make the sale.

### The tester

Contractors often say to clients that if they work with them, they will eliminate surprises. According to Matthew Walker, project manager at Double Check Builders Inc., based in Ronkonkoma, N.Y., LRRP is a big surprise that shouldn't be overlooked.

The first meeting with the homeowners is left to pre-qualifying and discussing the project. It's during that second meeting that Walker finds he typically is the first person to ever speak about the LRRP rule to the homeowner. "Every homeowner I've talked to is unaware of the regulation—they have no idea it exists," he says.

That is why Walker uses the EPA's "Lead-Safe Certified Guide to Renovate Right" brochure, as required by law, to help explain the dangers of lead and the LRRP rule. He discusses the health issues associated with lead exposure to children and discusses lead-safe practices designed to contain the dust in order to prevent illnesses.

By the end of that meeting, he tells clients that they need to have the home, or room, tested.

It is Double Check's procedure to recommend clients have their home tested by a third-party testing provider at a

cost of \$150. Although, third-party testing is not required by law, this is how Walker has approached pre-1978 work.

"The testing is an additional cost, but we explain to them it really saves them costs in the end by identifying exactly where the lead is—and isn't," Walker says. "If the lead is only in one area of the home or room, we will save them from the real additional costs associated with containment."

So far Walker has not experienced very much backlash about the test. He says one customer opted to have her entire house tested, not only the room that was being renovated, to locate lead for future renovation work.

And ultimately, the test identifies exactly where the hazard is, so in a way it adds another layer of protection. "One of their greatest fears is that it can affect their health negatively if it's not done properly," Walker says. But, as an EPA Certified Lead Renovator, Walker is able to explain the training he has gone through to ensure that the materials containing lead are removed properly and safely during the demolition.

The other big concern from homeowners is about cost but that conversation doesn't take place until the test results are in. "I tell them, let's see if there is lead, and we will go from there," Walker says.

### The optimist

When Laura Orfield-Skrivseth, co-owner, designer and project manager at Orfield Design & Construction Inc., based in Minnetonka, Minn., talks to her clients about LRRP, she keeps the conversation as positive and low-key as possible.

"I try to give the impression that it is no big deal—just another step in the construction process," Orfield-Skrivseth says.

Orfield-Skrivseth's attitude is so laid-back, she even doesn't bring the subject up until she presents the contract to her clients. It is at this time, when clients have an investment in the project, that she believes is the best opportunity to bring up LRRP. Plus, Orfield-Skrivseth says that most people are more interested in their project and the plans in the very beginning, not lead-safe work practices.

"When we're ready to present the contract, I have a meeting with the client that goes over the details of the scope of work," she says. "At this point, we already have the designs, and the clients know that we have their best interests at heart, so the plans are more justified." It is during this time that she informs them that she will use an EPA test-kit to perform the lead testing.

Interestingly enough, when Orfield-Skrivseth starts the conversation, she says the detail of her LRRP explanation varies from client to client. "I let the clients be the guide in dealing with them," she says. "If they are inquisitive about certain subjects, I spend more time with them and give them more information, but if they are the quick-to-the-point types, then I give them the information that they need along with the 'Renovate Right' brochure. Some people don't want to know all about the lead-safe practices, they prefer that I handle it."

The people who need more explanation are typically first-time parents, families with small children and older clients.

Being an EPA Certified Renovator and a mother of three young children has its advantages when Orfield-Skrivseth talks to the more sensitive clients about this subject.

"I believe having the information come from me is a huge asset when selling LRRP," she says, "because I handle the issue sensitively, with concern for their concerns and the understanding that I wouldn't do anything in their home that I wouldn't do in my own home with my children."

And then there are the 'eye-rollers' as Orfield-Skrivseth calls them. These are the clients that think the whole thing is ridiculous and don't want to pay the additional costs. "I tell them that they need to take it up with the government because I need to protect my licensing and my business," she says.

Most clients are not eye-rollers or ultra-sensitive. More often than not, Orfield-Skrivseth works with clients that accept the fact that it's a regular part of remodeling a home. "[It's similar to] putting up drywall and then adding paint. One comes after the other."

Overall, those who are successfully working with clients in pre-1978 homes are those who recognize this as an opportunity to educate the homeowner and promote the company's expertise as a Certified Lead Renovator. So often remodelers say that the Internet has made clients more informed than ever before, but because homeowners are largely unaware of this regulation at this point, contractors are now at an advantage of informing their clients of something they don't already know about. ■