

# What is Soil Lead

Factsheet #1

Although lead is no longer used in most products found in your home, lead can still be found in many industrial paints used on cars, trucks and ships. Lead is still used inside batteries, electronics, mixed metals, and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

## What is Lead?

- Lead is a naturally occurring metal found in small amounts. Lead is found at low levels in soil, water, air, and even in your home.<sup>1</sup>
- Throughout our history, lead has been a popular metal used because of its strength.
- In the early 1900s, doctors discovered that lead is harmful to the health of humans and plants.<sup>1</sup> There are now laws in place limiting the use of lead.<sup>2</sup>
- **Today, lead is the most common pollutant in urban soils.**<sup>3</sup>

## Why is there lead in my garden soil?

The biggest problem with lead in soils is that it doesn't go away.

**Once lead is in soil, it can stay there for hundreds of years.**

Before people found out that lead was dangerous, it was a commonly used material. Lead was used in:<sup>3</sup>

- Paints in homes
- Gasoline
- Water Pipes
- Batteries
- Building Materials
- Factory Processes

Dirt mixed with lead based housing debris was used to fill in and create a foundation for many housing areas. Smoke coming from factories and vehicles using leaded-gasoline released lead into the air.<sup>3</sup> In places near old factories or roads in Greater Portland, the lead in smoke released decades ago may have settled into your soil.<sup>3</sup> If your home was painted with lead paint, the paint could have chipped off your house directly into your soil.<sup>3</sup> **No matter where it came from, all the lead that has entered your soil over the past few hundred years is still there.**



<sup>1</sup> EPA, "Learn about Lead" (<https://www.epa.gov/lead/learn-about-lead>).

<sup>2</sup> EPA, "Lead in Paint, Dust, and Soil," (<https://www.epa.gov/lead/lead-regulations#paint>).

<sup>3</sup> Soil Science Society of America, "Lead" (<https://www.soils.org/discover-soils/soils-in-the-city/soil-contaminants/lead>).

<sup>4</sup> International Lead Association, "Lead Uses—Statistics," (<https://www.ila-lead.org/lead-facts/lead-uses--statistics>).

<sup>5</sup> Portland Press Herald, "The Night Portland Burned," ([specialprojects.pressherald.com/portlands-great-fire/](https://specialprojects.pressherald.com/portlands-great-fire/))  
[www.cumberlandswcd.org](http://www.cumberlandswcd.org)