

S. Tahoe houses get makeover to remove lead paint

By Kathryn Reed

Despite red tape saying danger, and doors and windows all taped up, this house in the middle of South Lake Tahoe has not been condemned. The residents are still living in it.

It's getting the ultimate exterior paint job. But it's not the typical job for contractor Doug Bolton with Carpets Plus Color Tile. A whole lot more rules must be followed compared to most jobs.

This project off Al Tahoe Boulevard is the first of many the city will fund with the \$1.5 million grant it received from the federal government to rid homes of lead.

One reason South Tahoe qualified for the grant is 85 percent of the homes were built before 1980, which means most are likely to have lead in either the exterior or interior paint.

For Julie Mullen, the lead is just on the outside and just on the siding. The eaves and trim don't have lead, so they can't be painted with grant dollars. The grant also allows for just one color. Mullen, at her expense, is having Bolton paint her eaves and trim a different color than the siding.

"It's a little slow because of all the precautions," Mullen said. "They want to make sure (the chips) don't fly anywhere."

Bolton has wrapped up the work on the house and is expecting the final clearance this week. He is going to bid on another job today and has three more of these painting contracts lined up.

He said he first heard about the lead paint rule in a trade publication even though the Environmental Protection Agency

had it on the books since the 1990s. It's the Obama administration that is enforcing the stringent requirements to ensure houses with lead paint are secure and don't have the dust flying everywhere.

When he started investigating about becoming certified, Bolton came across South Tahoe's program and that is how he got involved. He agrees with Mullen that it takes more time because of all the precautions.

Mullen said the process to qualify to have work done went quickly. It was making the months worth of copies of documents that took the most time.

Age of the house and financial status of the residents are the big questions. Having children pushes people to the top of the list. (Lead paint poisoning causes learning disabilities and behavioral problems. It's hard to get out of a person's system.)

It's the resident of the house who qualifies, not the owner. In this case, Mullen is the owner. She and her two children have lived there for 1.5 years, though she was born and raised in South Lake.

All potential houses are tested for lead with a \$20,000 piece of equipment the grant paid for.

When Nancy Kerry, No. 2 person in the city's Housing and Redevelopment department, applied for the grant she saw it as a way to give struggling contractors some work. Most of the jobs will be in the \$5,000 to \$10,000 range, but with people such as Mullen wanting more done the paycheck is even greater.

Other than the testing apparatus and paying for some classes out of town, the grant dollars are going into the local economy.

Ninety-three contractors took the special class to be

certified to do the work. Seven of them took the advanced class to be a supervisor. The Environmental Protection Agency requires a supervisor on each job.

The certificates earned by the people working on the Mullen house are posted on a board in her front yard. She doesn't mind.

"I hope people start to realize maybe they have lead in their houses too," Mullen said.

Kerry said the city's goal is to have 20 houses done by the end of the year. She expects 100 will be completed by the time the money runs out. It all must be done by 2013 based on the grant guidelines.

South Tahoe received a commendation letter from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for all of its accomplishments in the first year. Many grant recipients aren't close to having the first house worked on.

Kerry is going after an \$800,000 Healthy Homes Grant that would eliminate mold, mildew and radon from South Tahoe homes.

For more information about the lead paint program, call Nancy Kerry at (530) 542.6043.