

PROACTIVE APPROACH TO HEALTH

16th St. center targets hazards on south side

Lead and asbestos in older homes are prime concerns for residents

By JOE MANNING
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Concerned about environmental effects on health, the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center is beginning a two-year program to seek out environmental hazards on the near south side.

John Bartkowski, clinic director, said the environment was a major cause of illness, and that the effort would include alerting physicians to watch for symptoms associated with exposures to environmental hazards.

Financed through a \$500,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Milwaukee Foundation, the project will look for lead and asbestos hazards in homes as well as locate the estimated hundreds of hazardous sites that could be affecting the health of residents in south side communities, Bartkowski said.

Three outreach workers next month will begin going door to door in search of lead and asbestos hazards in homes, said Renee Baxmann, a nurse supervising the outreach workers who are undergoing training.

The area in which the out-

reach workers will work has 3,902 homes, most of which are old and present health risks to children from lead paint, Baxmann said.

Bartkowski said the five census tracts in the area that presents the greatest lead problem in the city are bounded by S. 16th St. on the west, S. 1st St. on the east, W. Pierce St. on the north and W. Lapham St.

Blood samples taken from children's fingers will be tested for lead levels, Baxmann said.

Educating Residents

The workers will teach residents about asbestos and lead poisoning and what can be done to overcome them, including calling in the Milwaukee Health Department to get rid of the problems, Baxmann said.

Of the 2,000 children 6 and younger living in the area, 500 are expected to have blood lead

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levels of 10 to 20 micrograms of lead per deciliter, which present health risks, Bartkowski said.

Bartkowski said federal, state and local government records will be used to find hazardous sites in an area bounded by S. 35th St. on the west to Lake Michigan on the east, and W. Canal St. on the north to W. Lincoln Ave. on the south.

The community health center, 1032 S. 16th St., has set up an office of environmental health where people may use a computer to find the locations of hazardous sites in their neighborhoods, Bartkowski said.

"The real goal in all of this is to build a capacity in the community for people to access this information," Bartkowski said.

Milwaukee Health Commissioner Paul Nannis said the program would "help individuals and families learn how they can take control and personally manage some potential environmental health risks. We can guide parents to act responsibly in an effort to protect their children."

Bartkowski said the Urban Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee will do health surveys to learn whether sites present risks to residents and what residents can do to avoid those risks.

He said: "We want to limit people's exposures through education."