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NCRCAP, INC. PILOTS LEAD HAZARD REPAIR PROGRAM IN TEN CHATHAM COUNTY HOMES

PITTSBORO – Ten low-income Chatham County families living in houses with lead-based paint hazards will have their homes repaired for free this summer. The NC Rural Communities Assistance Project, Inc. (NRCAP) is piloting the Chatham home repair program through a contract with the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

“NRCAP is our first non-profit sub-grantee,” said Beverly Baldinger, HUD Grant Manager, “and we’re very excited to be working with them on this project.” North Carolina received a \$3 million grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to repair lead-based paint hazards in 210 homes across the state, and NRCAP is leading the effort in Chatham County.

“Childhood lead exposure is an entirely preventable environmental health threat, and Chatham County children are especially at risk,” explained Marcia Perritt, Projects Manager with NRCAP. One-half of all housing units in Chatham County were constructed before the national ban on lead paint in 1978, and last year, only forty percent of Chatham County children were tested for elevated blood lead levels.

“The primary cause of childhood lead exposure is deteriorating lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust and soil inside and outside homes built before 1978,” said Baldinger. Even very low level lead exposure has been linked to learning and behavior problems, difficulty with communication, and diminished intelligence. “Children under the age of six are most vulnerable to these health effects as their bodies are in the early stages of development,” explained Perritt. “All children should be tested for lead at ages one and two.”

Since 2002, NRCAP has coordinated outreach to parents, medical providers, policymakers, and community groups to raise awareness of childhood lead exposure. “We’re delighted to finally have the resources to take a primary prevention approach and help families fix environmental health hazards before their children are affected,” said Margaret Wurth, Outreach Coordinator with NRCAP.

NRCAP is currently recruiting families to participate in the home repair program. To be eligible, a family must meet income limits, live in a house built before 1978, and have a pregnant woman or at least one child under the age of six spending time regularly in the home. “We understand many times grandparents, extended family members, or neighbors are a child’s primary caregivers, so our program is open to any household where a young child spends time,” said Wurth. There is absolutely no cost to participating families.

To determine if a family is eligible for the program, NRCAP staff members administer

a short intake questionnaire. If a family qualifies, an Environmental Health Specialist from the state will conduct a full in-home investigation to identify all lead hazards. If lead hazards are present, certified contractors will perform repairs using lead-safe work practices. The program includes funding to help families relocate temporarily if the home repair process poses health and safety risks to the family.

The North Carolina Rural Communities Assistance Project, Inc. (NCRCAP) is a non-profit organization working across North Carolina since 1987. NCRCAP strives to build a more equitable society by strengthening the ability of low-income rural communities to define and address issues and problems they are experiencing. Our mission is shaped by our commitment to provide all people with the opportunity to sustain safe, healthy, and productive living environments. For more information on the *Healthy Homes for All* program or other NCRCAP initiatives, please visit www.ncrcap.org or call 919-542-7227 or send an email to healthyhomes@ncrcap.org.

For more information, Contact: Margaret Wurth or Marcia Perritt, 919-542-7227



Regional Environmental Health Specialist Warren Richardson checks a Chatham County home for potential lead paint hazards.