

Ottawa County to tackle lead-paint problem

By Gary Garton

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MIAMI, Okla. - A new program to locate and control lead-based paint and other sources of lead in area homes will be available to all houses in Ottawa County and not limited to the Tar Creek Superfund site area.

Ed Crone and Tammy McKeon, with Grand Gateway Economic Development Services, gave a preliminary outline of the program to the Ottawa County commissioners on Monday.

Crone, executive director of Grand Gateway, said the agency has secured a \$1.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to conduct the local program.

"Recognizing that lead-based paint is a serious hazard for young children in all homes, we asked HUD to fund a project that would include the entire county," Crone said.

With a previous \$1.4 million grant from HUD, Grand Gateway conducted extensive lead-cleanup work at 51 homes in the Tar Creek Superfund area at Commerce, Picher, Quapaw and Cardin.

McKeon said the new grant will focus on "containment and control" of lead-based paint. "The contractors will clean the homes extensively, to remove residual lead, remove flaking paint and stabilize paint that is not loose or flaking," she said.

She said that by attacking specific problem areas in the individual homes rather than trying to clean up the entire structure, the project can cover more residences.

"We will be coordinating our work with that of a similar program being conducted by the Miami Tribe's environmental department, and hopefully we can cover the entire county," she said.

The Grand Gateway project will operate from offices above the Workforce Development office on North Main Street, just north of the Coleman Theater in Miami. The offices will be adjacent to the Miami Tribe's environmental department office.

McKeon said the Grand Gateway project will have four employees working under Jason Rhodes, project director. The staff will gather and evaluate information on homes in the county, and contractors will do the actual work.

"We have sent out requests to contractors in the area who are certified to handle hazardous-material work, and we hope to have a list of contractors ready to start on the project by April 15," McKeon said.

She said the project will rely on the public to request the service, rather than trying to make initial contacts. She said schools will be given information for children to take home with them, and the project will include a public-relations effort to make people aware of the service.

"This is actually what is known as an interim hazard-control project, and the homeowners will be expected to continue maintenance of the home once the initial work is done," she said.