

Healthier Indoor Air



Consumer Guide for Action

"All of us face a variety of risks to our health as we go about our day-to-day lives.... Indoor air pollution is one risk that you can do something about."— US EPA

People spend an average of 90% of their time indoors where air can be 2 to 5 times more polluted than outside. In fact, the US Environmental Protection Agency has repeatedly stated that indoor air quality is one of the nation's top four environmental health risks. Use the following tips and resources to make your indoor air healthier.

Breathe easier. Don't let anyone smoke in your house. According to the American Lung Association, cigarette smoke contains about 4,000 chemical agents, including over 60 substances that are known to cause cancer. Secondhand smoke can cause ear infections, lower respiratory tract infections, asthma, cancer and even crib death.

Open windows. Open windows for at least five minutes a day to let polluted air out and fresh air in.

Install carbon monoxide and radon detectors. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that is formed when carbon in fuel is not burned completely. At low concentrations, it can cause fatigue in healthy people and chest pain in people with heart disease. At higher concentrations, it can cause impaired vision and coordination; headaches; dizziness; confusion; nausea. It can also cause flu-like symptoms that clear up after leaving home. It is fatal at very high concentrations.

Radon is an odorless radioactive gas found in soil and rock. It can leak in through your basement or be carried in through natural gas. Radon is considered the second leading cause of lung cancer and about one out of every fifteen homes in the US has elevated radon levels. The US Environmental Protection Agency asserts that no level of radon exposure is known to be safe.

Keep humidity low. Repair leaks, open a window or turn on the exhaust fan when showering and use dehumidifiers or air conditioners in damp rooms (Clean and/or replace filters regularly).

Grow plants. They clean the air. Some plants have been scientifically proven to remove pollutants such as formaldehyde, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, benzene and ozone. Included in this list are bamboo palm, ficus, common chrysanthemums, marginata, spider plants and peperomia. One to two good-sized plants should purify a 10' X 10' room, depending on the level of pollutants. *(Be sure to choose plants that are non-poisonous and ater appropriately to avoid mold problems.)*



Keep all combustion equipment well maintained and inspected for safety.

Combustion pollutants can enter the home from furnaces, water heaters, stoves, space heaters, ranges and clothes dryers; anything that burns a fuel. These pollutants include nitrogen dioxide (which can damage the respiratory tract), sulfur dioxide (which can irritate the eyes, nose and respiratory tract) and carbon monoxide.

Reduce your use of toxic chemicals. Use natural cleaners like vinegar and water to wash windows and baking soda for scouring sinks and tile. When renovating, select products with low or no volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Avoid using pesticides, and synthetic air fresheners; they are generally completely unnecessary. Purchase personal care products made of natural ingredients and avoid synthetic perfumes.

Seal new cabinets and dressers built from pressed woods with a non-toxic sealer. Plywood and particleboard contain formaldehyde, which has been classified as a probable human carcinogen by the EPA, and it can off-gas from the wood into the air, silently polluting your home environment for years.

Seal off attached garages by using a vapor barrier over the walls shared with the home. Attached garages can leak auto exhaust, and vapors from paints, pesticides, and fuels stored there into your home. (Remember shared ceilings/floors in two story homes.)

Buy things used at thrift stores and yard sales. Used items have generally already off-gassed their most potent chemical fumes. In addition, they are significantly cheaper and buying used helps the earth by conserving resources and by keeping things out of the waste stream.

Resources:

www.healthyindoorair.org - To learn how to remedy most any indoor air problem, visit this site hosted by the EPA. They offer a multitude of fact sheets, pamphlets, videos, and more to fully educate yourself about indoor air quality.

www.epa.gov/iaq/homes/index.html - The EPA's direct website on home indoor air quality. The EPA also hosts the Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse, an easily accessible, central source of information on indoor air quality. The purpose of **IAQ INFO** is to help you locate information to answer your questions about indoor air pollution. Consumers may call the toll-free number **1-800-438-4318** or you make inquiries via e-mail: iaqinfo@aol.com anytime.

www.lungusa.org/air/air_indoor_index.html - The American Lung Association has the Home Air Quality Tips Booklet and Tips on Creating a Healthier Home for Children.

www.nsc.org/ehc/indoor/iaq.htm - The National Safety Council publishes downloadable fact sheets on a wide range of indoor air quality issues such as asbestos, asthma, carbon monoxide, combustion appliances, formaldehyde, lead, pesticides, and radon. For more information, contact an information specialist at **(800) 557-2366**.

The Key to Protection is Prevention

Improving air quality at home is one step we can take to protect health. We can also make it a priority in our communities.

- **Use the tools on our website to get your office, school, clinic or city to improve indoor air quality.**
- **Tell businesses that you want them to sell safe alternatives.**

Contact us to find out more and to join us on the path to a better future.

Call 612-870-3458 or log on to www.HealthyLegacy.org

Healthy Legacy

Healthy people, safe communities, a clean environment and a thriving economy.



Coordinated by: Arc Greater Twin Cities, Clean Water Action Alliance, Environmental Justice Advocates of MN, Indigenous Environmental Network, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Learning Disabilities Association of MN, Minnesota Nurses Association and Women's Environmental Institute