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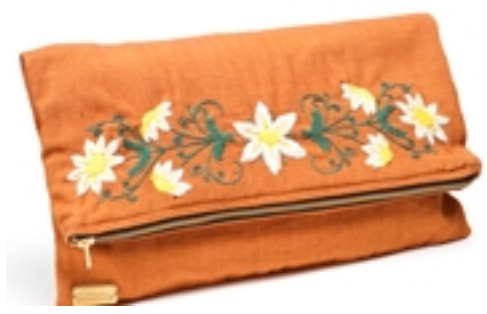

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Rid Your Home of the Indoor Air Pollutants

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Whether you realize it or not, you may be breathing your way to illness. Many cleaning products, air fresheners, and furnishings release air pollutants that are not only hazardous to human health, they're detrimental to our planet's health as well. In fact, research has shown that indoor air is often much more seriously polluted than outdoor air, even compared to large, industrialized cities! Given that we spend 90% of our lives indoors, and that the walls of our offices and building trap pollutants inside the spaces we occupy, scientists are seriously concerned.[i]

The first step to creating healthy indoor air quality is to recognize the biggest sources of air pollution. That's what this Hearts guide to ridding your house of indoor air pollutants is all about! You'll soon discover some detrimental, but common, products that are likely in your home, and learn solutions you can use today to protect yourself.

Quick Guide: Worst Indoor Air Pollutants

- **Air fresheners contain 26% toxic chemicals:** Household air fresheners contain toxins such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), phenols, naphthalene, dichlorobenzene, xylene, and up to 26% composed of terpenes.[ii] These chemicals are associated with health problems ranging from reproductive system disorders and neurological system damage to cancer.[iii]

- **1,000x VOC concentration with sealants, glues, and paints:** Used on flooring, woodwork, carpeting, and in pressboards, common paints, stains, adhesives, sealants, and wood finishes emit VOCs which contribute to respiratory tract irritations, dizziness, headaches, and numerous other adverse reactions.[iv] VOC levels in the home can be up to 1,000 times higher than that outdoors when these products are used.iii

- **Cancerous formaldehyde dangerous at 0.10 ppm:** Polyurethane foam in bedding and furniture, as well as textiles, wood products, paneling, particleboard, and pressed-wood products are sprayed with flame-retardants such as formaldehyde or PBDEs. Formaldehyde is a cancer-causing agent and respiratory irritant and dangerous at concentrations as low as 0.10 ppm (parts per million).[v] [vi]

- **21,000 cases of lung cancer from radon:** A naturally occurring radioactive gas, radon causes 21,000 cases of lung cancer death per year.[vii] You cannot see, taste, or smell radon, but you can test for its presence in your home. Radon typically enters homes through cracks and gaps in joints, flooring, walls, and foundations. Radon can also be found in water supplies.

- **10 times more indoor air pollution for cigarette smokers:** Cigarette smoke produces a pollutant known as fine particulate matter, contributing to indoor air that is 10 times more polluted than the exhaust from a diesel engine. [viii] Inhalation of fine particulate matter causes several diseases and disorders of the lungs and heart, including lung disease, asthma, and heart attacks.[ix]

- **Cleaners disinfect but poison:** Cleaning products emit air pollutants including VOCs, glycol ethers and terpenes. Formaldehyde is a carcinogen, and it also causes irritation to the eyes, nose, lungs, and throat.[x]

Take Action! Rid Your Home of Pollutants

1. **Choose natural air fresheners:** Short of cleaning up the offending odor(rotting food, a cat litter box, mold or mildew, trash cans, or dirty laundry) choose natural air fresheners. For instance, use baking soda, zeolite, or borax on carpets before vacuuming, or leave open boxes of these minerals in closets or basements to absorb odors. Alternatively, use essential oils like lavender in small quantities.

2. **Avoid high VOC furniture and textiles:** Buy furnishings and textiles that do not contain high levels of VOCs. Many furniture companies are now producing furniture without the use of toxic paints, stains, or chemical treatments. You'll recognize low-VOC, non-toxic furnishings and textiles by clean air certifications such as Cradle to Cradle, GREENGUARD, and Indoor Advantage Gold: Scientific Certification Systems (SCS). Many of these certifications will also ensure your furnishings and textiles are free of toxic flame retardants.

3. **Look for natural rubber:** Milk or sap from the rubber tree can be used to produce natural foam that is used in bedding and furniture. Natural rubber is completely renewable and emits no indoor air pollutants. Read more in our guide to natural rubber foam.

4. **Stop smoking:** If you don't stop smoking, you significantly increase your risk for lung cancer and other respiratory illnesses, and contribute significantly to poor indoor air quality in your home. Consult with an organization such as Cancer.org for tips on quitting smoking today.

5. **Get your home tested for radon:** Testing your home for radon levels is inexpensive and easy. If your home contains high levels of radon, radon reduction systems are available that will significantly reduce the levels of radon in your home. The EPA has plenty of practical information on radon testing based on where you live.

6. **Choose low VOC paints, stains, and sealants:** When possible, avoid using paints, stains, and sealants indoors. If you must use them indoors, be sure to open windows and use a fan to increase ventilation. Most importantly, buy products that are low in VOC levels. ConsumerReports.org has a great guide that rates low VOC paint products and discusses VOCs in depth.

7. **Use natural cleaning products:** Many cleaning products can be made at home using natural ingredients, such as

vinegar, lemon juice, and baking soda. Our guide to green cleaning products will get you started.

Dig Deeper: Indoor Air Pollution and Sick Building Syndrome

- Find out more about indoor air quality through the US EPA's Indoor Air Quick Finder.
- Poisonous indoor air can actually cause something called sick building syndrome, or SBS. The EPA has a lot of useful information on sick building syndrome including what you need to prevent it at home and at work.
- Learn more about terpenes in Many Cleaners, Air Fresheners May Pose Health Risks When Used Indoors.

Images via Dennis Wong and withassociates

References

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