

*Scientific Study****Researchers Say Your House Affects Your Health... and You May Not Realize It***

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Asthma, respiratory problems, behavioral changes, and fatigue are only a few manifestations of exposure to various indoor air pollutants. When a building is contaminated with everyday toxic materials which have rendered inhabitants ill, the building is referred to as a sick building. The inhabitants have sick building syndrome.

The prevalence of sick building syndrome is increasing rapidly. Teachers and students regularly report illness from mold, cleaning chemicals, and poor ventilation in their classrooms. Office workers report negative health effects from renovations and particulates from copiers and printers.

It is rare that staff, workers, and students fully understand the dangers of toxicity from these materials. Imai and associates, researchers at Mie University in Japan, state that “Public awareness of sick house syndrome and the dangers of toxicity from construction materials are vital to eliminate these aggravating factors and to prevent illness.”

Imai states that “in Japan, there has been a 10% increase in the number

of people suffering from sick house (building) syndrome due to toxic chemicals released from construction materials and wallpaper.” Sick building syndrome can lead to multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), which now affects more than 45 million men, women, and children and may lead to permanent and total disability.

Imai says, “Preventing early exposure to toxins at home is critical in reducing the likelihood of health problems in the community.” Toxic substances found in the home include air fresheners, cleaning products, pesticides, new furniture and carpets, paints, and clothing.

The generalized lack of public understanding of the dangers of toxicity from these everyday materials extends the period of exposure, leading to further injury. Denial of the toxic dangers can lead to permanent injury. Public awareness of sick house syndrome and the dangers of toxicity from construction materials is vital to eliminate these aggravating factors and to prevent illness.

Imai cites the most aggravating factors that worsen sick building syndrome as a lack of knowledge about the disorder, the difficulty in establishing a diagnosis, and the difficulty of taking radical measures to improve the home environment.



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New furniture is often treated with fire retardants, which have been implicated in reproductive disorders and do not outgas quickly. They gradually release vapors into the air where they are carried into the body via the lungs.

Clothing is treated with formaldehyde, which resists washing out and can cause allergies, toxicity, and respiratory irritation. Bedroom closets generally release copious amounts of formaldehyde into the air where most people spend many hours each night.

Fragrances and air fresheners are asthma and allergy triggers containing many toxic ingredients, including phthalates. Fragrances are unique in that there are as many of 3,000 – 5,000 fragrance chemicals, 95% of which are toxic petrochemicals, and none of which are regulated by any governing agency outside of the fragrance industry itself.

Fragrances can contain any number of chemicals which have not been tested for human safety, as well as those which have been tested and shown to be toxic.

There is a wide variety of safer building materials, though consumers should be alert to “green washing”, or false “green” claims. Green does not mean that something is non-toxic. It is advisable to investigate building materials carefully when renovating or building.

One of the best things that can be done to reduce airborne pollution is to ensure proper ventilation, filtering air, and allowing adequate circulation. Opening windows daily to allow fresh air exchange can go a long way to reducing stale and toxic air. Lack of adequate air circulation is common in schools and office buildings, where vents are often closed in the name of energy efficiency. However, good health requires vents remain open and fresh air allowed in.

If fresh air does not eliminate stale or foul odors, there are many ways to improve the air quality without the use of toxic air fresheners.

Adding a few indoor plants in each room limits carbon dioxide and increases oxygen. Some plants, including ferns, bamboo, and spider plants actually help to purify the air. The caveat to using plants is to ensure proper watering so mold and mildew does not grow in the soil.

Air purifiers, preferably whole house systems, do a wonderful job of eliminating airborne pollutants.



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The best measure is to keep the toxic substances out in the first place by choosing products wisely and airing them out before bringing them into the home. Sun and fresh air can help to off gas new items. If you can smell an odor, like that “new car smell”, you are breathing toxic vapors. Allowing items to air out in the sun for several days or several weeks before bringing them inside will greatly reduce family exposure to these substances. A good gauge on how long an item needs to air out is whether or not it still has an odor.

Before bringing the items inside, wash them thoroughly. Clothing can be soaked and washed in baking soda, white vinegar, and/or borax to reduce formaldehyde and dye chemicals.

Air can be kept safe in the home selecting fragrance free personal care and laundry products.

Integrative pest control involves treating when there is a problem developing rather than for prevention. This limits family contact with pesticides, which have been implicated as initiators of MCS. Pests can be managed in the home with safer alternatives to commercial pesticides. Some alternatives include:

- Sprinkle cinnamon, bay leaves or cayenne pepper in problem areas to control ants.
- Sprinkle equal parts

of baking soda and confectioners’ sugar in problem areas for roaches. Also, mix borax with mashed potatoes and add enough water to make balls which can be placed out of reach of children in cupboards and corners.

- Mice are repelled by kitty litter and peppermint oil, which can be placed on a cloth or cotton swab.
- Fresh live basil or mint will discourage flies, as will dried mint and basil.
- A bit of apple cider vinegar mixed with water and applied on person or left in a dish will discourage mosquitoes, as will wearing a cover-up to limit available biting places.

Lastly, if someone you know develops sick building syndrome, it is important for them to limit all chemical exposure and have their complaints taken seriously. People vary in susceptibility and one person developing sick building syndrome or multiple chemical sensitivity is a beacon of warning to everyone else who shares the same environment. It is crucial to take remedial action to prevent further injuries to both the affected and the unaffected.

Reference

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