

SICK HOUSE SYNDROME

Sick House Syndrome is a product of poor indoor air quality. This can cause or aggravate allergies, asthma, chemical sensitivity, migraines, cancer and emphysema. These conditions alone may affect half of the population and women, children as well as the elderly are particularly at risk.

Indoor air contains particles, fibers and gasses, many of which are substances of concern. They may be categorized as irritants, allergens, sensitizers, estrogenic substances or toxins etc.

Particles of concern include lime and silica dust from concrete, tiny chips of lead paint, pet dander, carbon from burning fuels and candles, and body parts from dead mites and mold.

Fibers of concern include: asbestos, fiberglass, animal hair, and carpet and textile fibers.

Gasses of concern include: volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds (solvents), carbon monoxide, and moisture

These substances may be emitted from building, furnishing and cleaning materials, tracked in on shoes, clothing and pets, brought in with the air that leaks into the house through cracks and sewers, or they may grow like molds and mites inside the house.

To improve Indoor Air Quality it is best to perform a do-it-yourself or professional audit to locate typical sources and perform tests if necessary, and ensure that heating, ventilating and air conditioning equipment is regularly serviced. Each substance has a recommended method for remediation, some like lead, asbestos, radon and mold are exceptionally dangerous and should be assessed by appropriately trained and licensed professionals. Be cautioned that do-it-yourself renovation and clean up projects frequently cause serious, often life long and sometimes fatal health effects.

TYPICAL UPGRADES TO IMPROVE INDOOR AIR QUALITY INCLUDE:

- INSTALL IMPROVED FILTERS; HEPA VACUUM CLEANERS
- HIGH EFFICIENCY FURNACES AND HOT WATER HEATER; DUCT CLEANING
- BATHROOM AND KITCHEN EXHAUSTS AND AIR EXCHANGERS/HEAT RECOVERY VENTILATORS
- AIR SEAL ALL GAPS AROUND WINDOWS AND DOORS
- WATERPROOFING BASEMENTS; DISCONNECTING DOWNSPOUTS FROM WEEPING TILE
- MAINTAIN A SEAL IN ALL SEWAGE TRAPS
- MITE PROOF MATTRESS AND PILLOW COVERS, AND NON ALLERGENIC BLANKETS (ALLERGIES AND ASTHMA)
- AVOID FLANNEL PAJAMAS, BLANKETS, AND DETERGENT AND ANTI STATIC RESIDUES.
- AVOID TOYS, MATTRESS COVERS AND OTHER SOFT MATERIALS CONTAINING LATEX, VINYL (PVC), OR NEOPRENE
- WASH ALL NEW CLOTHING IN BORAX BEFORE USING

SOME OTHER ACTIONS TO TAKE:

- REMOVE PAINTS, SOLVENTS, PESTICIDES AND FERTILIZERS FROM STORAGE INSIDE THE HOUSE
- USE WALK OFF MATS AT DOORS
- USE SOLVENT FREE, LOW TOXICITY AND HYPOALLERGENIC PRODUCTS
- REPLACE POROUS SURFACES SUCH AS CARPET WITH SMOOTH SURFACE MATERIALS
- USE CARBON FILTERS ON SHOWERS TO REDUCE CHLORINE EXPOSURE
- AIR OUT DRY CLEANING BEFORE BRINGING IT INDOORS
- AVOID USING UNVENTED APPLIANCES, GERMICIDAL PRODUCTS, AIR FRESHENERS, WAXES AND PERFUMES
- AVOID USING PESTICIDES AND SYNTHETIC FERTILIZERS

For more information, contact your local health department, regional EPA office or Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC), in the U.S. In Canada contact National Research Council of Canada, Occupational Health and Safety or Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

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