

Unflued gas heaters and cooktops

The use of unflued gas heaters and cooktops produces levels of nitrogen dioxide, and carbon monoxide that can be harmful to health. They also produce particulates that increase respiratory disease.

Children exposed to emissions from unflued gas appliances are twice as likely to get chest colds.

Formaldehydes and other VOC's

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and formaldehyde are gases produced by many substances in modern homes, including solvents, floor adhesive, particle board, wood stain, paint, cleaning products, polishes and room fresheners, furniture and carpets.

Exposure to these compounds are linked to eye, nose and throat irritation, immune system disorders and respiratory effects, including asthma.

Environmental Tobacco Smoke

The adverse effects on health of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), has been well established through many years of research. ETS refers broadly to what used to be called passive smoking, and is a major health concern for those people, and

especially children, who live with a smoker who smokes inside the house or family car.

Exposure to ETS can lead to or inflame asthma and other respiratory diseases; glue ear and other middle ear infections; nose, throat and chest infections like croup and wheezing. ETS also increases the likelihood of SIDS.

Allergens

Dust-mites are the primary allergens in a normal household. Dust-mites live in textile materials such as carpets, bedclothes and furnishings. Dust-mites, along with other household allergens like pet hair, can cause respiratory impairment, especially for asthma and hay fever sufferers. Dust-mite levels in Australian homes are said to be some of the highest in the world due to our relatively warm and often humid climate.

Some experts have noted an association between high levels of indoor dust and high levels of asthma.

Mould

Damp, humid conditions like laundries, bathrooms and air-conditioning systems are favourite haunts of fungi (for example, mould and yeast) and bacteria (for example, Legionella). The design of modern housing means that new houses are more airtight, with more indoor laundries and bathroom

that have inadequate ventilation. Our modern lifestyle, too, means that our homes are locked, and airtight, for extended periods of time.

Ceiling Dust

The ceiling cavities of houses are notorious for collection of years of dust. This dust may have concentrated levels of harmful materials and substances that may once have been air pollution. In particular, heavy metals accumulate in ceiling dust over the years through roof tiles and any other tiny gaps in roof construction.

Aside from ceiling dust being an aggravator of respiratory problems, some of the heavy metals it may contain are known carcinogens.

Cleaning Products

Most cleaning products available on the market today do not use natural substances to be effective. Often they use a cocktail of chemicals that hold a lot of potential to adversely affect human health, especially when regularly used in poorly ventilated environment. Insect sprays, oven and kitchen cleaning products, and bleach, ammonia and other bathroom cleaners are some of the chemical-containing products used around the home.

Where strong cleaning agents are needed for particular tasks, it is important to minimise inhalation of toxic fumes.

Ventilation and Moisture

Adequate levels of ventilation for domestic air quality need to be balanced with reduced vent for energy conservation in winter.

Increased ventilation and reduced heating can also reduce the incidence of mould and dust mites.

What you can do:

- Build a home that has good ventilation all year round, or if you're not building, ventilate your home well all the time
- Maintain appropriate levels of ventilation during winter
- Choose building products that are low- or non-emitting
- Choose products that tend not to collect dust
- Choose gas appliances that are flued
- Use exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathroom
- Do not smoke inside your car or home, or around children
- Clean your home, and especially furnishings, regularly
- Choose cleaning products that are based on natural or low irritant ingredients
- Ventilate well after periods of rain to reduce indoor moisture

- Consider leaving cats and dogs outside
- Consider purchasing a central vacuum system, or one with a high efficiency HEPA post-motor filter.
- Instead of putting the heater on when it gets cool, put on a jumper.

Websites to go to for more information:

<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/insidest.html>

<http://www.ea.gov.au/atmosphere/airtoxics/sok/chapter7.html>

http://www.fast.org/site/releases02/clean_air_full.pdf

<http://health.discovery.com/tools/insideair/insideair.html>

<http://www.indoor-air.org>



Healthy Cities Illawarra
63 Auburn St, Wollongong, 2500
phone: 02 4226 5000

INDOOR AIR QUALITY What You Need To Know

