

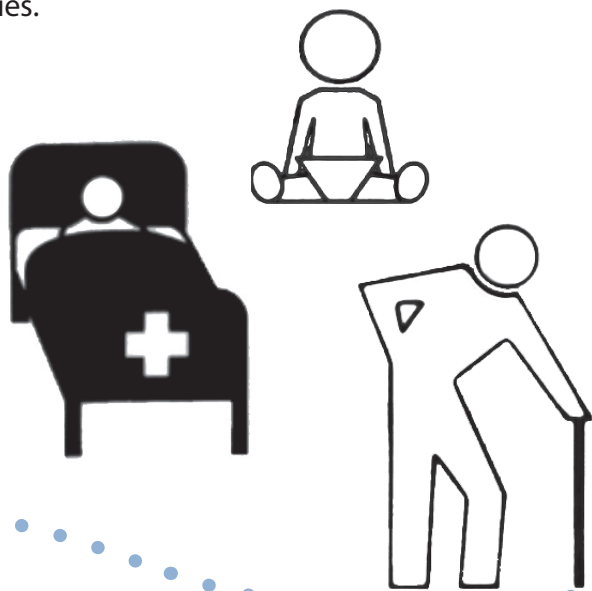
Be Aware of Your Indoor Air

Did you know the air inside buildings is nearly always more polluted than outside air?

Did you know most people now spend 80 percent to 90 percent of their lives indoors, breathing that more-polluted air?

A High Risk

Indoor air pollution is a high-ranked health risk. How it affects your health depends on the amounts and types of pollutants in your air and how often you breathe them. Air pollutants can harm some people more than others. The risks are greatest for sick people, the elderly, the very young and people with allergies.



You can't refuse to breathe, but there is a lot you can do to make your home a healthy place to live and breathe. The first step is to be aware of what might be in your indoor air and how it could harm your health.



HEALTHY HOME

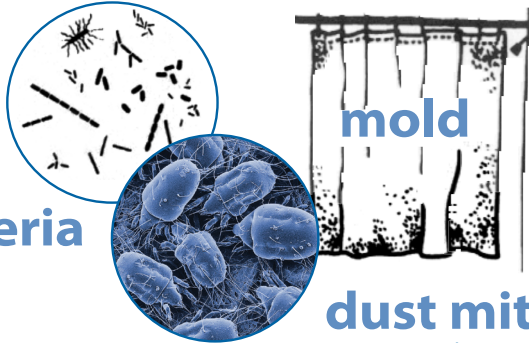


Types of Indoor Air Pollution

Nature's Revenge Biologicals and Radon

Sources:

- Humid air, damp things and wet ground under your home can lead to molds, dust mites and bacteria growing in your home.



bacteria

dust mites

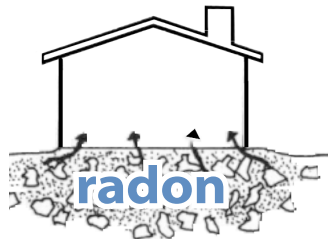
- Fine dust in the air you breathe can be bits of animal dander, insects, dust mites and pollen.

dander



pollen

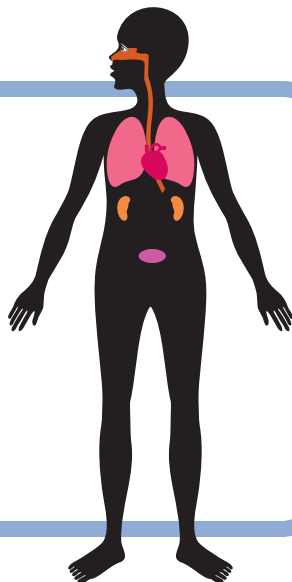
- Radon is a radioactive soil gas that can seep in through cracks and build up in homes. Radon problems are rare in Louisiana.



radon

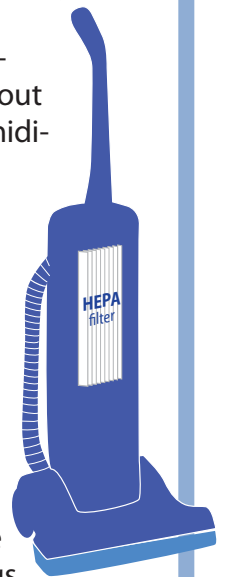
Health Risks:

Dust mites, mold, insect droppings and pollen in the air can cause asthma attacks and allergies. Bacteria and viruses can cause diseases. Radon causes lung cancer.



What You Can Do:

- Use bathroom and kitchen exhaust fans to get rid of wet air. Vent clothes dryers outdoors.
- Make sure soil under your home stays dry. Rainwater should flow away from your home.
- If you have a flood or leak, remove soaked carpets and materials right away.
- Check and empty the drip pans of refrigerators. Make sure air conditioner drains are functioning properly.
- If your home is made energy-efficient and airtight, make sure the air conditioner is not oversized. Get a load calculation from your air conditioning dealer or electric company. Oversized air conditioners do not take enough moisture out of the air. Consider using a dehumidifier if humidity stays too high.
- Mop and wipe away dust. Buy and use a HEPA vacuum cleaner.
- If anyone has allergies, keep animals outside. Also, wash bedsheets in hot water every two weeks and choose smooth flooring instead of carpeting to reduce dust mites. Use washable area rugs.
- Get your home tested for radon.



Types of Indoor Air Pollution

Burning Issues Combustion Pollutants

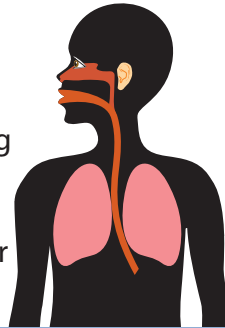
Source No. 1:

Tobacco smoke has more than 4,000 compounds in it, including carbon monoxide and formaldehyde. The air carries these pollutants all over your home. Fabrics and things in your home trap them long after you can't see any smoke.



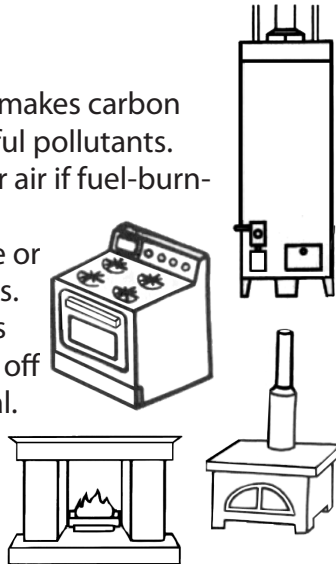
Health Risks:

About 40 of the compounds in tobacco smoke could cause cancer. Breathing secondhand smoke causes thousands of lung cancer deaths each year. It also causes many children to suffer from bronchitis, pneumonia, ear infections and asthma attacks.



Source No. 2:

Anything that burns a fuel makes carbon monoxide and other harmful pollutants. They can build up in indoor air if fuel-burning appliances and heaters have no vent to the outside or have leaky or clogged vents. Wet wood, smoldering fires and yellow gas flames give off more pollution than normal. Car exhaust also can seep into homes.



Health Risks:

Breathing carbon monoxide starves the body of oxygen. You can't see or smell it. Large amounts are deadly. Symptoms are headaches, nausea and other flu-like symptoms. Other combustion pollutants can irritate your eyes, nose and throat. Over time, they damage your lungs.



What You Can Do:

- Don't let anyone smoke in your home, or at least limit smokers to one room. If you allow smoking in a room, keep the door closed, open a window and put a fan in it to blow air to the outside. That will help keep the pollutants from spreading throughout your home.



- Never smoke around children.

- Keep gas heaters and appliances correctly adjusted. The flame should be blue.



- Get your heaters, flues and chimneys inspected and cleaned every year.

- Don't use kerosene heaters indoors. If you must use a gas space heater that is not vented to the outdoors, open a window a little, keep inside doors wide open and don't fall asleep.



- Never use a charcoal grill indoors. Use an exhaust fan or open a window when using a gas cooking stove.

- Put good weatherstripping around the door from the home to the garage. Never run the car in a closed garage.

- Get a carbon monoxide alarm for your home.

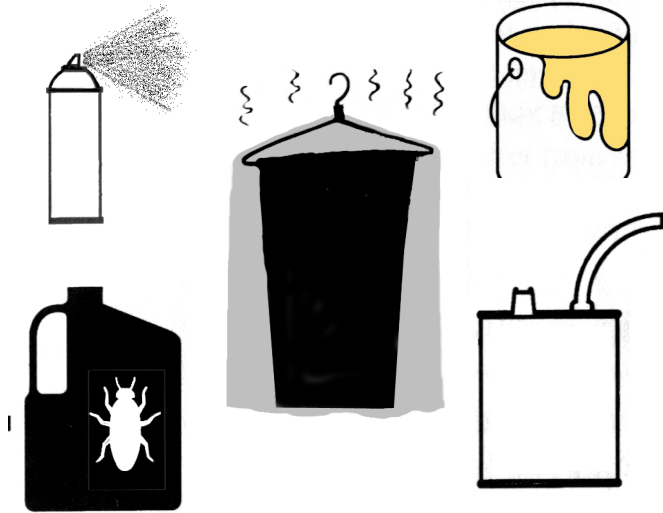


Types of Indoor Air Pollution

Pollutants of Choice Organic Gases and Pesticides

Sources:

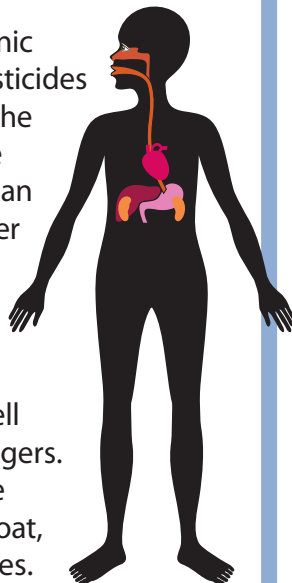
Common products used in homes are made of many chemicals. Both natural and artificial chemicals can put harmful, volatile-organic-compound (VOC) gases in your air. When you use them indoors, the level of harmful gases in the room can get very high. Even when containers are sealed, volatile-organic-compound gases can leak out into your air. Some building materials (like pressed wood) and decorative furnishings (carpets, fabrics, etc.) release unhealthy gases, especially when new and when the air is warm and humid.



Health Risks:

Over time, some volatile organic compounds and chemical pesticides can cause cancer or damage the central nervous system. Some chemicals are very toxic and can harm you quickly. Some bother only people with allergies. Others have not been found to be harmful.

Warning labels on products tell you about serious known dangers. Some common symptoms are problems with eyes, nose, throat, vision, memory and headaches.



What You Can Do:

- Read labels carefully, and follow the directions. If a label says you need "adequate ventilation," use the product outside if you can. If not, open all windows and use exhaust fans.
- Store anything that makes fumes outside of your home. Safely get rid of old and unneeded chemicals, fuels, pesticides, paints, etc. (Find out if your community has hazardous household waste collection days.)



- If your dry-cleaned clothes have a strong chemical smell, try a different dry cleaner.
- Don't use outdoor pesticides inside your home. Don't use any more than directed by the label. To cut your need for pesticides, keep your home clean and keep garbage outside. When needed, use baits, traps and boric acid for pest control. Bathe pets often.



not indoors

- Shop for less toxic types of products and building materials. Look for "low VOC" (volatile organic compound) products.
- When shopping for new carpet, look for "green label" carpet tested for low emissions. Go outside when carpet is being installed, and air out your home for three days after installing new carpet.



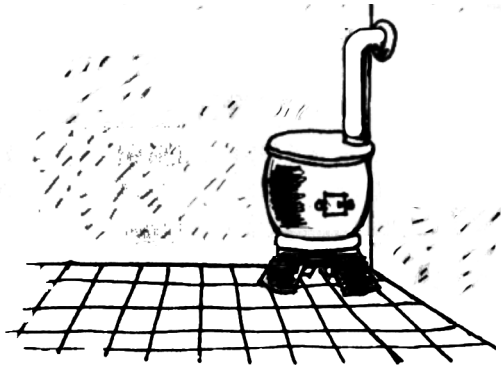
- If your home has a lot of pressed wood, try to keep the indoor air cool and dry.

Types of Indoor Air Pollution

Remodeling Hazards Lead and Asbestos

Sources:

Some homes built before 1978 and many homes built before 1960 have lead-based paint and asbestos materials. Floor tiles as recent as 1986 could have asbestos. If they are in good shape, there is usually little danger. Any kind of damage to those materials can put lead or asbestos dust into the air, however. Soil with lead in it can get inside and add lead dust to the indoor air.

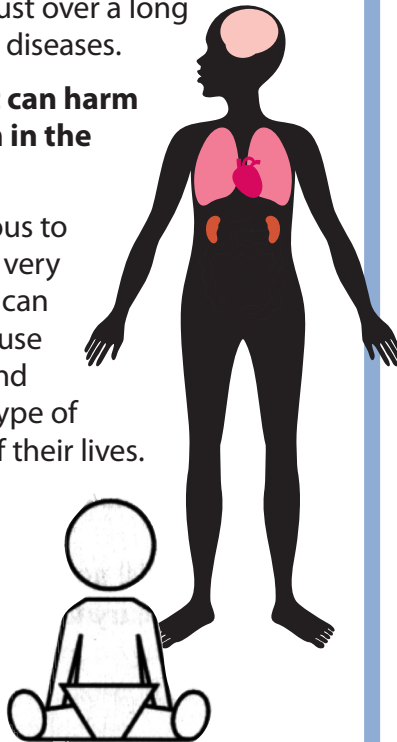


Health Risks:

Breathing asbestos dust over a long time can lead to lung diseases.

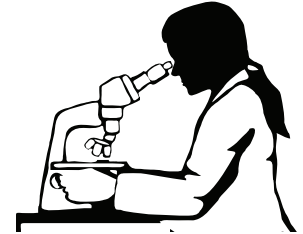
Breathing lead dust can harm nearly every system in the body.

Lead is most dangerous to young children. Even very low levels in children can lower intelligence, cause behavior problems and affect hearing. That type of damage can last all of their lives.



What You Can Do:

- Before you remodel or fix up your home, find out if it has any lead-based paint or asbestos in it. Check with your local health department to find labs or contractors that can test for lead or asbestos.



- Do not sand, scrape, burn or damage lead-based paint or asbestos materials. Leave them alone. If they must be removed, only workers trained and certified in safe removal methods should do the job. Hire only EPA lead certified renovators for work on homes built before 1978; ask to see their certificate.



- Wet wipe paint dust and loose paint chips with a solution of detergent in warm water. Wear disposable gloves. Throw away the cleaning rags and gloves in a sealed plastic bag.
- Get more information about lead and asbestos in the home.



To learn more about
INDOOR AIR QUALITY

Visit www.epa.gov/iaq or call 1-800-490-9198

for free information from the Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Environments Division. For more information about other healthy home and family topics, contact your parish LSU AgCenter Cooperative Extension Service family and consumer science educator.

For blood lead tests, medical advice and treatment,
visit your doctor or health unit.



See and learn more about the advantages of a high performance home and how to achieve them. Visit **LaHouse Resource Center** in Baton Rouge, La. or on the web, Facebook and Pinterest.

Claudette Reichel, Ed.D., (Retired) Professor and Extension Housing Specialist, LSU AgCenter



The LSU AgCenter is a statewide campus of the LSU System and provides equal opportunities in programs and employment. Louisiana State University is an equal opportunity/access university.

Visit our website: www.LSUAgCenter.com

**Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service
LSU College of Agriculture**

Released in Georgia by Dr. Pamela Turner, UGA Extension Housing & Environment Specialist, with permission from LSU.

Georgians wanting to know more about this topic may contact their local Extension office at 1-800-ASK-UGA1

extension.uga.edu

Circular 2579 (Co-published as LSU Pub. 2579)

Reviewed February 2023

Published by the University of Georgia in cooperation with Fort Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and counties of the state. For more information, contact your local UGA Cooperative Extension office. *The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (working cooperatively with Fort Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the counties of Georgia) offers its educational programs, assistance, and materials to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation or protected veteran status and is an Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action organization.*

The permalink for this publication is <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C2579>