



Protecting The Air You Breathe – Inside Your Home

No matter how different you are from the people with whom you share your home, you all have one thing in common: you breathe the same air. The quality of the air inside your home can affect your health, so you should be careful to guard against problems that could allow your indoor air quality to deteriorate.

Biological pollutants can have an important impact on indoor air quality. Some of these pollutants occur in all homes and are impossible to eliminate completely. These pollutants may include mold, bacteria, pollen and animal dander (minute scales from hair, feathers or skin).

People's sensitivities to such substances may vary greatly. A level of pollen or leaf mold which sends an asthma sufferer to a hospital emergency room may have no effect on another person living in the same household. If someone in your household has an acute sensitivity to pollen or leaf mold, you may need to install an air cleaner.

Cleaning your home regularly is very important when you are trying to control problem biological pollutants. People who are allergic to these pollutants should not vacuum and may even need to leave the premises when vacuuming is occurring, because vacuuming can increase the level of the pollutants entering the air.

The way you clean your home can affect the quality of your air. Some household products can release chemical compounds which remain in the air long after the cleaning is finished. Be careful to follow all label directions; if the label calls for use in a "well-ventilated" area, open your windows to provide the maximum amount of outdoor air possible.

Safe storage of such products is also important. Gases can leak even from closed containers. Such products should be stored in a well ventilated area and out of the reach of children. Should you decide that you no longer need the products, you should safely dispose of them. Do not simply put them in your garbage can. Call your local government and find out the proper method of disposing of household hazardous waste.

Living habits in a home can affect the quality of the indoor air. In general, if the air becomes stuffy or smoky, or if odors linger, open a window a crack or turn on an exhaust fan. Before you light a fire in your fireplace, open either the external air supply on your fireplace or a nearby window. When someone in your home takes a bath or shower, or when someone boils water on the stove, it's a good idea to turn on an exhaust fan, because mildew starts growing at 70 percent relative humidity.

Many scientists are currently studying the quality of air in homes. Federal, state and local governments have opened offices to deal exclusively with the issue. If you have questions about indoor air quality, you may be able to obtain further information by calling your state or local government, your public library, or your local UW-Extension office.

The issue of indoor air quality is important, but it is no cause for panic. By understanding the issues and taking routine precautions, you should be able to breathe easily and healthily in your home.