

Tips for Healthy Remodeling

Remodeling makes our homes fit better, but may not make us feel better. Even under normal conditions, air inside our homes can be 2 to 5 times more polluted than air outside. When you add fumes from painting and gluing, dust from demolition and scraping, and the offgassing of synthetic building products, you can have a house with very unhealthy air.

Sources of Indoor Air Pollution

Paints, paint strippers, and other solvents release chemicals into the air called “volatile organic compounds,” or VOCs. VOCs can cause eye, nose, and throat irritation; headaches; loss of coordination; nausea; and damage to liver,



Ask for “low VOC” paints and finishes, between 0-250 grams per liter

kidneys, and central nervous system. Some compounds are suspected or known to cause cancer. **What to do:** Look for paints and

finishes that emit low or no VOCs. Avoid aerosol products.

Pressed wood products such as particleboard and fiberboard, used in furniture, subflooring, and paneling, release formaldehyde for many years. Formaldehyde exposure has symptoms similar to those of VOCs; some people also experience severe allergic reactions, rashes, and nose bleeds. **What to do:** Look for solid wood products instead. Seal exposed boards with water-based polyurethane.

Carpet pads and glues. Carpet padding can contain formaldehyde (see above). **What to do:** Ask for carpet padding made without formaldehyde and for carpet that does not need to be glued down. Ask if new carpet can be unrolled and aired out in the warehouse prior to being installed in your home.

Dust and particles. Dust from demolition and remodeling can trigger asthma attacks. Particles from sawing, scraping, and sanding may contain asbestos, lead, and arsenic. **What to do:** See other side.

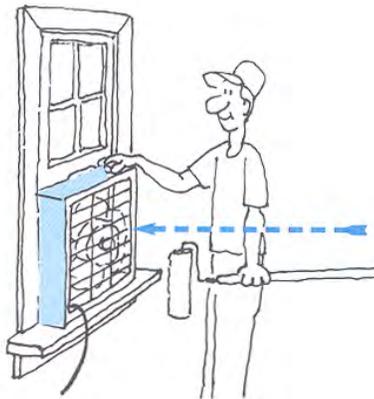
While You’re Remodeling

During the project, isolate work areas from living spaces with plastic sheeting or zipper doors. If you have pets, keep them out of the work area so they don’t track contaminants throughout the home. Shut off the air ducts in the work area and keep the rest of the home well-ventilated.

If you have sensitive individuals in the home, consider having them move out during a major remodel. This could include anyone with asthma or allergies, especially children; people who are chemically sensitive; and pregnant women.

Place heavy-duty floor mats at each entrance door. Sweep work areas daily, and vacuum frequently several times a week, using a high-efficiency filter (“HEPA filter”). Wear a dust mask when cleaning up as well as when working. In addition, you can set up an air filter (but not an ozone-generator – those irritate the lungs) and box fans to pull air outdoors.

Set up fans to pull dirty air out. Open a window elsewhere in the house to bring fresh air in.



If your home was built before 1978, it’s important – and easy – to test for lead paint with a kit from your paint store. Older homes also are likely to have asbestos in flooring, ceilings, or shingles. Consult with professionals to determine the best way to deal with asbestos or lead paint; they are serious health hazards and may need to be removed by professionals.

After You Remodel

If you can’t use solvent-free paints and other finishes, keep out of a newly painted room until it has been aired for several days. This is very important if you are pregnant or preparing a child's bedroom; children and developing fetuses are more affected by toxic chemicals because their bodies are still developing.

After remodeling, change your furnace filters. Use the pleated paper high-efficiency furnace filters. They capture many more particles than the typical fiberglass filter. Ideally, you should change these filters every two or three months, especially after remodeling. If you have mold or dust accumulated in your furnace ducts you could also have them cleaned, but this is not always a necessary step.

Safely dispose of leftover hazardous materials from remodeling, including mercury-containing thermostats, fluorescent tubes, and paints and solvents, at an appropriate hazardous waste facility. In Thurston County, homeowners can use HazoHouse at the Thurston County Waste and Recovery Center at 2418 Hogum Bay Road in Lacey, for free. Latex paint can be dried out and disposed of in the garbage. Contractors can also use HazoHouse but need to pay. For information call 360-867-2491 or see www.co.thurston.wa.us/www

For More Information

For more information, call Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, Environmental Health Division at 360-867-2674 (TDD line 360-867-2603) or visit our website at <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehkids/index.html>

Another resource is “Preferable Building Materials for the Nursery and Child’s Room” by the Washington Toxic Coalition see <http://www.watoxics.org/> under Toxics in the Home or call 800-844-SAFE ext. 7.

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