

6

Live in a Healthy Home

For the most part, we're blissfully unaware that the environment *inside* our homes is far more toxic than the air outdoors, even in cities where trucks and factories belch noxious pollution.¹

Entire books have been written about how to make our homes truly healthy places to live, and we enthusiastically recommend these two, which are loaded with useful information and resources:

- *Home Safe Home: Creating a Healthy Home Environment by Reducing Exposure to Toxic Household Products* by Debra Lynn Dadd, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005.
- *Homes That Heal and Those That Don't: How Your Home Could Be Harming Your Family's Health* by Athena Thompson, New Society Publishers, 2004.

Toxic homes can trigger health consequences other than cancer, such as allergies, multiple chemical sensitivity, chronic fatigue syndrome and asthma, so the whole picture needs addressing. But let's focus on three cancer concerns:



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Building 'green' is becoming mainstream.

Whatever we do to our home, we do to ourselves.

— Athena Thompson, author of *Homes That Heal and Those That Don't*

- Construction materials and finishes
- Air and water systems
- Home furnishings.

In Solutions 7 and 9, we'll take a closer look at household products — such as cleaners, paints and art supplies — and radon gas and electromagnetic radiation (EMR).

In *Cancer Where You Live* (p. 36), we saw that our homes are built with many toxic products. Particleboard and plywood contain formaldehyde; toxic adhesives, sealants and caulks, and solvent-based paints release volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as toluene and benzene; wall coverings and blinds are often made with PVC. And that just skims the surface of our building challenges.

If you have the resources to remodel your home or build one from scratch, a whole new era has dawned in healthy building materials over the past few years. Non-toxic products include insulation made of 100% recycled denim or cellulose, emission-free wheat straw fiberboard; reclaimed wood, ultra-low VOC paints and finishes, and healthy roofing and driveway materials.

Make Sure Your Indoor Air Is Fresh

- Reduce or eliminate the toxic products and furnishing that pollute your indoor air. Open the windows daily and let the sun shine in.
- Equip your house with an energy recovery ventilator to provide fresh and filtered air at close to room temperature.
- House plants such as aloe vera, English ivy, ficus benjamina (fig) and the peace lily will

remove at least some carcinogens, including formaldehyde and benzene.

- Install air filters and change them regularly.

Make Sure Your Water Is Pure

Alas, it may be contaminated with pollutants such as chlorine and its by-products, cadmium, lead, fluoride, VOCs, solvents and pesticides. As Athena Thompson says, “Ultimately, we must restore the purity of our water by dealing directly with the sources of toxins in our global environment. In the meantime, we must take the matter into our own hands by installing whole house and point-of-use water filtration systems.”

Home Furnishings

We recommend the use of:

- Healthy flooring options such as natural cork, linoleum with jute backing, engineered hardwood with ultra-low VOC finishes, natural stone tiles, pigmented concrete and area rugs made from natural fibers and non-toxic dyes, instead of carpets.
- Certified organic fabrics for bedding, towels and upholstered furniture; cotton or hemp shower curtains; certified organic window covering or naturally finished wood shutters, louvers or metallic venetian blinds.
- Natural wall finishes such as plaster and water-based zero- or low-VOC paints.
- Mattresses made from natural materials such as certified organic cotton or pure-grown wool; bed frames and kitchen cupboards made of wood that is free from toxic glues, particleboard and chemical stains.

- *Building for Health*, healthy and environmentally sound building materials and home comforts: www.buildingforhealth.com
- Building Green: www.buildinggreen.com
- Environmental Home Center: www.environmentalhomecenter.com
- *Guide to Less Toxic Products*: www.lesstoxicguide.ca
- *How to Grow Fresh Air: 50 Houseplants That Purify Your Home or Office* by Dr Bill Wolverton, Penguin, 1997.
- Kitchen water filters: www.consumersearch.com
- Toxic carpeting: www.holisticmed.com/carpet
- Treehugger: www.treehugger.com

Is there a Bau=biologist in the house?

The primary focus of the relatively new science called Bau-Biologie — originally developed in Germany — is how buildings affect the health of their inhabitants and how to improve the health of both. Bau-biologists perform full-spectrum evaluations, based on measurable standards:

- Exposures to chemicals, both as shorter-term gases in the air (VOCs) and as longer-term molecules that attach to house dust.
- Building and finishing materials made of natural, renewable, biodegradable resources, which are considered more compatible with the human body.
- Exposures to micro-organisms, including mold and bacteria, and other micro air pollutants such as dust and dander.
- Thermal and moisture conditions.
- Electromagnetic fields, both man-made and natural
- Radiation from various sources, natural and man-made.

Bau-Biologie is a field with many facets and interpretations, says Debra Lynn Dadd, “but at its heart, it’s about practical ways to support life, whether that be our own bodies or the larger ecosystems that sustain us.”² (See bau-biologieusa.com)