Symptoms of

Sick-house syndrome: Symptoms and solutions

By JAMES AND MORRIS CAREY The Associated Press

any people are unaware that indoor air pollution can be just as bad as, or even worse than, outdoor air pollution to an individual's health.

EPA studies of human exposure to air pollutants indicate that indoor air levels of many pollutants may be two to five times, and occasionally, more than 100 times, higher than outdoor

It's estimated that most people spend as much as 90 percent of their time indoors — making home, school and the workplace potentially hazardous to one's health. Health risks probably are higher for infants, the elderly and people with chronic dis-

Further, laws designed to improve energy efficiency by cutting down on drafts don't improve indoor air quality. Tightly sealed homes constructed in the last couple of decades might have diminished the use of fossil fuels, but have wreaked havoc with Americans' respiratory systems. Homes that can't "breathe" can't

dilute pollutants contained in build-

ing and decorating products.

Indoor pollution sources that release gases or particles into the air are the primary cause of indoor airquality problems. Inadequate ventilation can increase indoor pollutant levels by not bringing in enough outdoor air to dilute emissions from indoor sources, and by not carrying indoor air pollutants out of the home. This allows concentrations to build

up. High temperature and humidity levels also can increase concentrations of some pollutants.

All these pollutants have one thing in common; they contain chemicals that are part of a larger class of chemicals known as Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). VOCs are organic (carbon-based) chemicals that evaporate readily at room temperature.

VOCs typically are found in high indoor concentrations in dry-cleaned clothing; chloroform from chlorinated water: benzene from tobacco smoke (one of the leading indoor air pollutants); formaldehyde from fabrics, pressed wood products and insulation: styrene found in adhesives. foam, lubricants, plastics carpets and insulation; methylene chloride from paint strippers; and carbon tetrachloride from paint removers.

air pollution are central heating, cooling and dehumidification systems, household cleaning and maintenance products, outdoor sources such as pesticides and biological contaminants such as animal dander, mold and cockroaches.

even fatal.

While this is not particularly good news, awareness is the first step in creating a more healthful indoor environment and improving your health. Your best defense against indoor air pollution is a strong offense.

First, identify and control sources of pollution to reduce and prevent indoor air contamination. This can range from changing housecleaning products to airing out freshly drycleaned clothing to tossing out formaldehyde-containing furniture. Equally important is improving ventilation. Proper ventilation — the mixing of indoor air with outdoor air can revitalize the air in your home

Since cigarette smoke is one of the single greatest contributors to indoor air pollution, smoking indoors is a nono. Similarly, fireplaces and other fuel-burning appliances (water heaters, furnaces, stoves, etc.) should be properly adjusted and vented to the exterior. Doing so will both pre-

While indoor air pollution affects people differently, in general, shortterm exposure might cause immediate effects such as headaches, dizziness and allergies. Long-term exposures can result in respiratory disease, heart disease and cancer, all of which can be severely debilitating,

Building-related illness is an identifiable disease or illness that can be traced to a specific pollutant or source within a building. In contrast, the term "sick building (sick home) svndrome" is used to describe situations in which building occupants experience acute health and comfort effects that appear to be linked to time spent in a building, but where no specific illness or cause can be identified. Both syndromes are associated with acute or immediate health

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vent carbon monoxide poisoning and improve the efficiency of the appli-

Adequately sized exhaust fans should be used wherever moisture and combustion are present in the bathroom, laundry and kitchen. A bath fan, for example, will help to dissipate chloroform gas, which is a byproduct of chlorinated water. It also will remove excessive moisture that can lead to mold which can produce yet more health hazards.

There are other indoor air pollu-

tants that deserve your attention, such as asbestos, lead and radon. The first two were used pervasively in building products before being outlawed by the EPA in the late 1970s. The rule of thumb with asbestos and lead is that it is best left alone if it in good shape and not peeling or crumbling.

Asbestos or lead should not be scraped or sanded and should be removed only by a professional abatement contractor with the proper equipment. Moreover, testing should be performed after the abatement process to ensure the air quality is

Radon, on the other hand, is a naturally occurring gas that is derived from uranium in the ground. Radon can make its way into a home through cracks in foundation or basement walls. Small amounts of radon can be controlled by sealing cracks with a caulking or patching compound. Higher levels might require the installation of an exhaust system to disperse concentrated amounts into outdoor

Do-it-yourself test kits are available for many indoor air pollutants such as lead or radon. Other indoor pollutants such as asbestos require professional testing. In either case, if you haven't or someone in your family hasn't been feeling up to snuff, or if you suspect that your home contains more than its share of pollutants we suggest that you have your home tested by a pro

For more information on indoor air pollution and what to do about it visit the EPA Web site at www.epa.gov or the American Lung Association Web site at www.lungusa.org.

Flooring

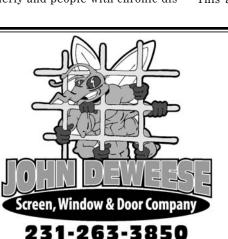
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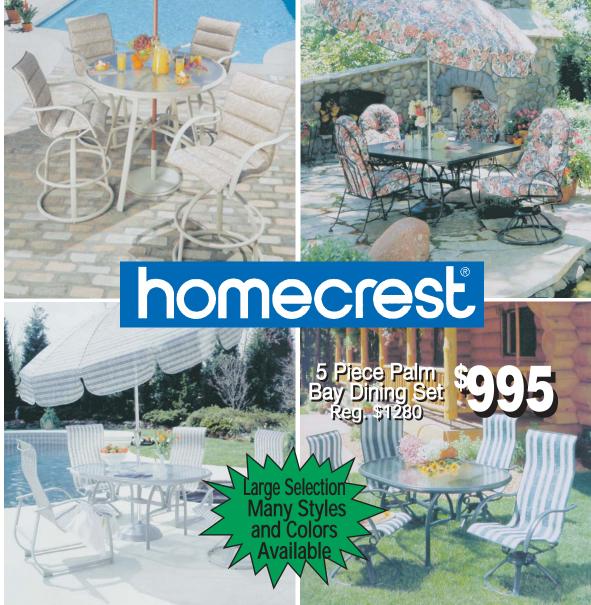
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