

Care for your air - Reducing VOCs in your home

Did you know that the air inside your home is, on average, two to five times more polluted than the air outside? Because we spend the majority of our time indoors, homeowners are quickly realizing the importance of keeping their indoor air as clean as possible.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are one important contributing factor to poor indoor air quality. VOCs are emitted as gases from many everyday items, including paints and lacquers, paint strippers, cleaning supplies, pesticides, furnishings, building materials and cleaning materials.

VOCs can have a detrimental affect on your health. In the short-term, they can cause eye, nose, and throat irritation; headaches; loss of coordination and nausea. Over the long term, VOCs have been attributed to damaging the liver, kidney and central nervous system. Some are also known to cause cancer. The compounds have a particularly damaging effect on people with asthma or other breathing issues.

Thankfully, there are ways you can reduce your exposure to VOCs:

- Buy products that are labeled no- or low-VOC, including paint and cleaners.
 - Increase ventilation when using products that emit VOCs.
 - Use household products according to manufacturer's directions.
 - Throw away unused or little-used containers safely and only purchase the amounts you need. VOCs can “leak” out of closed containers you have stored on shelves and in cabinets.

There are also home maintenance activities you can do to help lower the concentrations of indoor air pollutants in your home:

Open your windows. Most home heating and cooling systems, including forced air heating systems, do not mechanically bring fresh air into the house. Opening windows and doors, operating window or attic fans, when the weather permits, or running a window air conditioner with the vent control open increases the amount of fresh air coming into the home.

Install fans. Bathroom and kitchen fans that exhaust outdoors remove contaminants directly from the room where the fan is located and also increase the outdoor air ventilation rate. Consider installing a mechanical ventilation system, which introduces fresh air using ducts and fans, instead of relying on holes or cracks in the walls and windows.

Add an air cleaner. There are many types and sizes of air cleaners on the market, ranging from inexpensive portable models to sophisticated whole-house systems. Some air cleaners are highly effective at particle removal, while others, including most tabletop models, are much less so. Air cleaners are generally not designed to remove gaseous pollutants.