

What's NOT in a Healthy Home...

We often hear what it takes to make a healthy home: strong, positive relationships, good communication, commitment, care, etc. But in this article, we are going to look at what is NOT in a healthy home. Specifically, we will look at those things we need to keep out of our homes to help the living environment stay healthy.

The dirt on dust: Dust is made up of some fairly nasty components which may include such elements as insect fragments, lead dust, pesticide residue, pollen, dust mite, animal dander, cigarette ash, fungal spores, and human skin fragments. Studies show that 30 to 40% of the contaminants found in homes are transported inside from outdoors. Studies also indicate that cockroach exoskeletons and droppings can trigger asthma. This means that dust can contribute to an unhealthy home.

Dust is carried into the home in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most common mode of transport is on shoes and clothing. Pets can contribute to this situation, as well. They pick up contaminants on their paws and in their fur which transfers to indoor surfaces. It should not be surprising that the greatest concentration of dust is found in carpeting near the home's entry door.

Children have the highest risk of being exposed to contaminants found in their homes. They like to run, walk, crawl and touch as part of their natural development. Children are more likely to put their hands in their mouths as another source of exposure. Some adults are at risk though, as well. Anyone with asthma or other respiratory problems should take every precaution to reduce the amount of dust in their home. People with weakened immune systems are another vulnerable group.

Dr. Pamela R. Turner, Associate Professor and Extension Housing Specialist from University of Georgia Cooperative Extension explains that the first four steps people take inside their home contributes almost 85% of the outdoor contaminants found in the home. In her publication "Leave it at the Door.." she shares a few simple steps people can use to improve the health of their home and reduce the amount of time spent cleaning:

- 1) Place doormats on the outside of doorways and the door connecting the garage to the home. A grate-like mat on a hard surface will help take some of the courser material and pollutants off.
- 2) Follow the outside doormat with an inside mat that is highly absorbent. This will capture additional soil, pollutants, and moisture that come in off shoes from the outside.

- 3) A second "finishing mat" placed behind the first indoor mat can help capture any remaining particles. (See diagram)
- 4) For an added layer of prevention, take your shoes off and leave them at the door. The carpeting found in many homes will serve to continue removing particles. If shoes are worn on the carpet, any contaminants not removed with the doormats now ends up in the carpeting.
- 5) Individuals can place indoor shoes with non-slip soles to safely move about their home. People with balance issues or a tendency to be unsteady on their feet should use hard-soled shoes with good traction to wear inside.

Source: "Leave it at the Door: A Guide to Reducing Contaminants in Your Home" University of Georgia Extension
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By using doormats as the first line of defense, families can dramatically decrease the amount of pollutants and contaminants that can make their home unhealthy! The Environmental Protection Agency reports that when a doormat is used and shoes are not worn, lead dust and other chemicals in the home were reduced by about 60%. While reducing exposure to allergens and respiratory irritants, doormats can also reduce the wear and tear on indoor floor surfaces and/or carpeting.

Within the home, you can find other potentially dangerous substances that contribute to an unhealthy home. Taking a walk through the home to look for these substances and removing hazards is the first step to making a home healthier.

Listed below are some of the more common hazards found in various locations in a home:

Basement: paint, paint stripper, varnish, radon

Bathroom: medications, aerosols, drain cleaner, toilet bowl cleaner, lead

Bedroom: mothballs, dry cleaning, mercury thermostat

Kitchen: oven cleaner, light bulbs, air freshener, batteries, lighter fluid

Garage: herbicides, pesticides, weed killer, gasoline, antifreeze

Laundry room: bleach, detergents, stain removers

Living room: candles, lead, carbon monoxide

When these substances are found, they need stored properly or removed from the home and special care taken in their disposal. Keep volatile products on high shelves in a location with good ventilation. Lock up dangerous chemicals to keep them away from children or pets. Read and follow the directions on the label for both use and storage. For those hazards that need removed, find out where to take them by calling the recycling center or the waste management company used for trash pickup.

Everyone wants a health home to live in. As the winter months and cooler weather approaches, people will be spending even more time inside their home. Taking precautions to ensure a healthy home can reduce health issues later. For more information on providing a safe and healthy home environment, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

Illustration Source: <http://www2.epa.gov/iaq-schools/controlling-pollutants-and-sources-indoor-air-quality-design-tools-schools#PreventingtheEntryofPollutants>