

Daily Union Article

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Title: Clear the Air – Part 2 of 2

In last week's article, I shared information about outdoor and indoor air quality. With the high temperatures and humidity Kansas weather offers this time of year, many people are choosing to stay indoors in air-conditioned comfort. This reduces risk of becoming overheated and lowers exposure to the pollens and air particulates that aggravate allergies found in outdoor air.

However, staying inside may have its own health consequences. Being aware of the effects of poor indoor air quality will help you make choices that can preserve your indoor air quality.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) as the air quality within and around buildings and structures, especially as it relates to the health and comfort of building occupants.

Understanding and controlling common air pollutants in your home and workplace can help reduce your risk of indoor health concerns.

Some indoor air health effects can show up soon after initial exposure or through repeated exposures to the pollutant over time. Effects such as itchy or irritated eyes, nose, and throat are among the first symptoms to arrive. Headaches, dizziness, and fatigue can also be some of the initial indicators of poor air quality. These more immediate effects are often short-term and easily treatable. Treatments may range from simply leaving the indoor environment, eliminating exposure to the source of pollution. For people who already have respiratory diseases, exposure to poor indoor air quality can aggravate or worsen their condition in a relatively short amount of time.

Some health effects that may not show up until years after the exposure include respiratory disease, heart disease, and cancer. Due to the potential of a delayed presence of symptoms, it is important to try to improve and maintain the air quality in your home.

There are several steps you can take to improve the air you breathe.

- 1) Measure the radon gas level in your home. There is no way to tell if your home has an elevated radon level without testing. The Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 119 E. 9th Street, Junction City, KS has radon gas test kits

for sale for \$5.50. Once your home has been tested, you will be able to determine if you need to hire a professional to install a radon mitigation system in your home. For more information about the effects of radon gas, go to <https://www.epa.gov/radon>.

- 2) Weatherize your home. This not only reduces the amount of energy needed to cool or heat your home, it also helps reduce the amount of outdoor pollutants that enter your home. While this step is underway, you can also take steps to minimize the pollution generated within your home. Organic chemicals are commonly used in household products. Paints, varnishes, and wax are but a few product that contain organic solvents. Cleaning products contain similar chemicals, as well. All of these products can release pollutants while using them if not while storing them. Store these products away from your home – in a garden shed, garage, or separate shop area.
- 3) Change your air filters regularly – even in the summer. Sometimes you may need to do this more often during the months you use your air conditioner than you do when you are running your heater! At my house in the country, the dust accumulates much faster on our air filter during the heat of the summer than it does in the winter. I attribute this to the dirt and dust that blows during these dry spells as well as the increased particles in the air from the alfalfa, hay, and soil worked up during this busy season of agricultural production.
- 4) Personal habits can contribute to air pollution in your home, as well. Environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) is often referred to as “second-hand smoke.” This by-product of smoking is a complex mixture of over 4,000 different compounds, more than 40 of which are known to cause cancer in humans or animals. To reduce this risk, don’t allow smoking inside your home. Research shows that smoking in a designated space may reduce the risk to non-smokers but it does not eliminate the risk. If smoking indoors cannot be avoided, increase the ventilation in the area that is designated for this purpose. Use exhaust fans and/or open windows. Be aware that natural and mechanical ventilation techniques are not able to remove the pollutants generated from smoking as quickly as they build up in your home. Finally, avoid smoking around children as they are particularly susceptible to the effects of passive smoking. Infants and toddlers are unable to leave the smoking area on their own, so they will breathe in the pollutants and potentially have long-term effects from the ETS. If you send your children to daycare, ask questions about their policies regarding smoking on the property.

Although many consumers associate the a variety of symptoms to being exposed to new carpet, the Consumer Product Safety commission reports that there has been no

conclusive research that ties the chemicals emitted by new carpet is responsible for these symptoms. However, if you are concerned about this possibility, ask your carpet retailer about the emissions from carpet and ask them to unroll and air out the carpet in a well-ventilated space before installation. Use window fans during and after installation along with opened windows to help ventilate your home during the first 48-72 hours after installation.

Keeping your lungs healthy leads to a healthy body. By knowing the health risks related to poor outdoor or indoor air quality, you can take steps to maintain good health that will enable you to enjoy life longer. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!