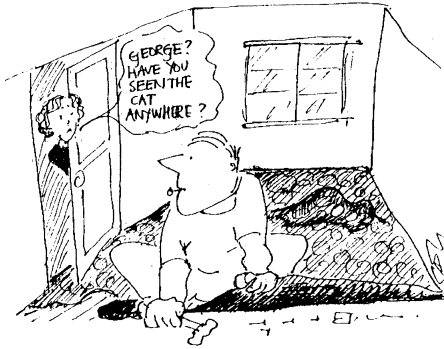


Hazards in the Home

Indoor Air Pollution



Do It Yourself

70 people die each year while carrying out DIY jobs and as many as 250,000 injuries are bad enough to be reported to doctors.¹ Other injuries caused by the materials used in home decorating, in fittings and furniture may not be so obvious.

Carpets can contain heavy metals, pesticides and PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls). They also contain colonies of dust mites.

Vynyl linoleum (not to be confused with real linoleum, made from natural products), is a major source of PVC (polyvinyl chloride), linked to emissions of deadly dioxin.² Other chemicals found in vinyl include phthalates. (see Factsheet 7)

Children are most at risk because they play on the floor and they inhale 23 times as much air as adults, weight for weight.³

Most modern **furniture** is made of pressed wood products that emit chemicals which can be toxic. **MDF** (Medium Density Fibreboard) contains the carcinogenic chemical formaldehyde, and it doesn't have to be cut to release its toxic fumes.

Solvents

These can be found in paints, carpets, glues, fabrics and chipboard. There is a bewildering number of solvents and most are highly toxic.

Paint

As paint, paint thinners and removers dry, dangerous fumes called Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC's) are given off.

Asbestos

More than 20 million homes built before 1985 may have asbestos in them (3,000 workers die every year from asbestos related disease). People who carry out construction work such as electricians, plumbers, carpenters and gas installers are most at risk.⁴ If you suspect that there is asbestos in your home, ring the Council on 233 3000. For advice on asbestos diseases contact: Liverpool & District Victims of Asbestos Support Group, Oriel Chambers, Water Street, Liverpool L2 8UQ, tel: 0151-236 1895



Old paint probably contains **lead**. It is sweet, which makes it attractive to young children, who may chew on painted window-sills or the edges of furniture. The symptoms of lead poisoning are weight loss, behavioural problems, anaemia and weakness. Long term exposure can lead to kidney and brain damage.

Alternatives

The Healthy Flooring Network (HFN) have called on consumers to avoid buying vinyl flooring and fitted carpets. #

Bare floors, with a few areas of rugs means less dust, although this is colder in winter.

Paints continue to release toxic fumes for some time after application. So rooms should be well ventilated - even for natural paints. Look for the VOC rating (1-5 on the tin) and avoid the higher ratings. The least toxic way to remove paint is by sanding. If you do have to remove it wear a mask.

Plants take chemicals from the air. Solvents can be removed using chrysanthemum, Gerbena, Marginata, Peace Lily, Warneckeii or English Ivy, and the areca or butterfly palm is rated as the most eco-friendly of houseplants.⁵

Waste paint disposal is a large source of pollution, as half empty tins are thrown in skips or tips. Liverpool City Council have no facility for disposal.

#The HFN Guide to Healthy Flooring is available with a large s.a.e. from HFN, c/o The Women's Environmental Network, PO Box 30626, London E1 1TZ. Tel: 0207 481 9004, www.healthyflooring.org



Sources of Information

1. The Liverpool Daily Post (19.03.01)
2. Women's Environmental Network. 020 7481 9004, www.healthyflooring.org
3. The Guardian (04.05.01)
4. London Hazards Centre, www.lhc.org.uk/
5. Ethical Consumer Magazine (issue 58). www.ethicalconsumer.org

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