

TEN ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS YOU CAN LIVE WITHOUT

We all play a role in preserving the world's environment for future generations.
Here are 10 environmental hazards *you* can control in *your* home to improve *your* environment!

1. TOBACCO SMOKE – NO SMOKING AT HOME

Long-term exposure to other people's tobacco smoke increases risks for lung cancer, respiratory diseases and infections, heart attack, and many childhood diseases.

- ✓ Don't smoke or allow others to smoke in your home.
- ✓ Call the American Lung Association HelpLine at **800-LUNGUSA [586-4872]** or visit www.lung.org for more information on smoking risks.
- ✓ If you smoke, make a commitment to stop – join the Freedom From Smoking® Online help program at www.ffsonline.org.

2. RADON – TEST YOUR HOUSE

Radon is an odorless invisible gas that increases the risk of lung cancer, especially for smokers.

- ✓ Radon tests are inexpensive. For information on testing your house or apartment (if you live on the 2nd floor or lower) contact the National Radon Hotline at **800-SOS-RADON [767-7236]** or www.sosradon.org.
- ✓ For information on testing for radon and lowering levels in your home, access *A Citizen's Guide to Radon: The Guide to Protecting Yourself and Your Family from Radon* at www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/citguide.html.

3. ASBESTOS – LEAVE IT ALONE

Asbestos was commonly used as an insulating material in homes built from 1920-78. Exposure to small amounts of asbestos is unlikely to cause problems, but breathing high levels increases risks of cancer and lung disease.

- ✓ Identify if asbestos is present in your home and if so, avoid disturbing it.
- ✓ Only specially trained and licensed contractors should remove asbestos. Improper removal techniques can greatly increase your exposure risk.
- ✓ For information on how to identify asbestos and when to remove it, contact the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Hotline at **800-638-CPSC [638-2772]** or visit www.cpsc.gov/en/safety-education/safety-guides/home/asbestos-in-the-home to read about *Asbestos in the Home*.

4. LEAD – IDENTIFY AND AVOID IT

Many U.S. homes built before 1978 contain lead paint which contributes to the more than 1,000,000 children suffering from lead poisoning each year.

- ✓ Young children at risk for lead exposure should have their blood tested for lead levels. Talk to your physician about the appropriate testing schedule.
- ✓ If you live in an older home, and especially if you have children, test for lead paint. Testing is required in many states before homes can be sold or rented.
- ✓ "De-leading" a house should only be done by licensed trained professionals. If not properly performed, the process can result in much greater lead contamination.
- ✓ For further information on how to protect your family from lead poisoning, contact the EPA's National Lead Information Center at **800-424-LEAD [424-5323]** or www2.epa.gov/lead.

5. COMBUSTION GASES – EXHAUST THEM

Combustion gases include carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and sulfur dioxide. These gases can cause flu-like symptoms, respiratory illnesses, or death.

- ✓ Do not use unvented combustion appliances indoors. Portable kerosene heaters are especially risky.
- ✓ Use an exhaust hood over a gas stove; consider using stoves that do not require always-on pilot lights.
- ✓ Clean and maintain your chimneys and furnace annually. Be certain that furnaces and water heaters are properly vented and install a carbon monoxide monitor. Local fire departments and poison control centers can provide advice about such detectors.

6. WATER – KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DRINKING

Americans benefit from one of the safest water supplies in the world, but problems may occur. You can take a few extra measures to assure your tap water is clean.

- ✓ Public water systems provide annual water quality reports to their customers. For more information, visit EPA's Ground Water and Drinking site at <http://water.epa.gov/drink/index.cfm>.

- ✓ People using wells should test their water annually for nitrate and bacteria. Depending on location, testing may also be appropriate for pesticides, organic chemicals, or radon. Check with your local public health officer to determine the need for specific tests.
- ✓ Older plumbing systems (pre-1988) may contain lead. Lead levels are highest in water that has been sitting for 6 or more hours. To decrease lead exposure, let water run until it becomes cold before drawing it for cooking or drinking.
- ✓ Home water treatments/filters can improve the taste of water and in some cases its healthfulness, but the wrong or badly maintained filter can create a hazard. For more information, consult EPA at www.epa.gov/safewater/faq/pdfs/fs_healthseries_filtration.pdf.

7. HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS – SELECT, USE, STORE, AND DISCARD WISELY

Some household products may be hazardous if used incorrectly. Choose the least dangerous chemical for the job. Consult your municipality, library, or the Internet for information on this topic.

- ✓ Keep household chemicals out of reach of children and pets. If possible, toxic chemicals should be stored outside of the house and away from living spaces.
- ✓ Follow label directions carefully. Never mix chemicals unless directed to do so by manufacturer instructions and never store them in unlabeled containers.
- ✓ Dispose of chemicals properly on a household hazardous waste day. Contact your local fire department or health department to learn the time and place for hazardous waste disposal in your community.
- ✓ For poisoning emergencies, call the Poison Control Center at **800-222-1222** or **911** if a person has collapsed or is not breathing.

8. PESTICIDES – USE PROPERLY TO REDUCE RISKS

Maintain gardens, lawns, and trees in ways that naturally decrease susceptibility to pests and minimize or eliminate the need for chemical pesticides. Consult EPA at www.epa.gov/oppfead1/Publications/lawncare.pdf.

- ✓ Store firewood outside and away from the house to avoid wood-destroying insects. Keep food in tight containers and clean up food residues to minimize household pests.

- ✓ Follow label instructions for personal protective equipment, mixing, application, and disposal. Always keep pesticides in locked cabinets out of the reach of children, and never transfer pesticides to unlabeled containers that may be mistaken for food or drink.
- ✓ Contact the National Pesticide Information Center at **800-858-7378** or visit <http://npic.orst.edu> for more information about the safe use of pesticides.

9. ALLERGENS – AVOID AND CONTROL

Porous, water-damaged materials frequently grow molds and other organisms that can exacerbate allergies or other illnesses.

- ✓ Fix leaks and moisture problems – see www.epa.gov/mold/moldresources.html for more information.
- ✓ Do not humidify your home unless you clean the humidifier according to manufacturer instructions.
- ✓ Keep furry animals out of the house or at least out of bedrooms. Brush them outside.
- ✓ Wrap mattresses and pillows in allergy-proof covers.
- ✓ See the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology's tool, *Home Allergy Management for Everyone*, at <http://acaai.org/resources/tools/home-allergy-management> for more information.

10. FOOD POISONING – PREPARE AND STORE FOOD CORRECTLY

Proper preparation and storage of food are necessary to prevent food poisoning.

- ✓ Keep your refrigerator below 40°F, and promptly refrigerate cooked perishable food.
- ✓ Wash cutting boards with soap and hot water after each use.
- ✓ Do not allow raw meat, poultry, or fish to come into contact with food that will not be well cooked.
- ✓ Do not eat raw or undercooked eggs.
- ✓ Fish can be part of a healthy diet, but some contain chemicals or infectious agents that may be harmful to certain people. Consult federal/state fish advisories (<http://water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/fishshellfish/fishadvisories/index.cfm>).
- ✓ For more information about food safety, consult www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsafety/.

For additional information about environmental hazards consult these other resources – www.epa.gov or www.atsdr.cdc.gov.



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