

Green Irene Guide to Indoor Air Quality



Before you start reading this, take a moment for one big deep BREATH. At the risk of sounding like a yoga instructor, three deep breaths will lessen your tension, relax your shoulders and lower your blood pressure. That “cleansing breath” won’t be so cleansing if your air is full of pollutants. You can’t control the air quality in your local park or the airport lounge, but you can control the air in your own home. While companies, and hopefully governments, are working on outdoor air quality, you can focus on the air your family breathes at home. Your Green Irene Eco Consultant will help you identify, and eliminate sources of indoor air pollution.

The Price of Convenience

In our quest for convenience we may slowly be poisoning the air in our homes. Our carpets show no stains, our upholstered furniture no spots. Our walls can be cleaned with a wipe and our ovens with a spray. We try to prevent pests with one type of spray and a moldy shower with another. We “freshen” smells away with an army of products and light candles for atmosphere in every room. The magic behind all these conveniences is chemicals. 80,000 chemicals are in use to produce everything from shower caulk to shampoo. The vast majority of these chemicals have never been tested for toxicity. I am all about convenience, but are my lungs, and more importantly my children’s, the testing ground for these chemical cocktails? The many chemical compounds in today’s building materials (vinyl, pressboard, paint and polyvinyl chloride to name just a few) leach out of their source products and become a part of our indoor environment. Common household things, such as carpet, wallpaper, and paint, continue to “off-gas” potentially toxic fumes long after they are installed.

What Pollutes our Indoor Air?

Indoor Air Quality is exactly what it says it is. How clean is the air we are breathing when inside? Since all the cars, factories, and smoke belching trucks are outside, inside must be cleaner. Wrong. EPA research shows that indoor air can be even more polluted than the worst air in our most polluted cities. Since Americans spend an average of 90% of their time inside (that looks like another issue that needs addressing...), indoor air quality has an enormous impact on our health. The numbers of allergy and asthma sufferers have risen sharply. This dramatic increase in breathing related illnesses began about forty years ago. Building practices that evolved out of the 1970s energy crisis may explain this increase. New construction at that time focused on “tight homes” that were heavily insulated, tightly sealed and more energy efficient. While these new construction practices helped conserve energy, they also locked in allergenic particles and toxic compounds.

Moisture and mold are important factors in indoor air quality. Heating and air conditioning ducts which are dark, damp and rich in “nutrients” provide the perfect breeding ground for

mold, fungi and dust mites. These potent allergens are spread rapidly through the ducts of our home. These allergens circulate through our indoor space along with pollen, dust, tobacco smoke, pet hair and pet dander. You probably feel like sneezing just reading this list. Since our homes are now so energy efficient, these indoor pollutants are not going to leave by themselves. Your Green Irene Eco-Consultant helps you focus on not bringing them in for starters, and then how to get them out.

Don't Bring Pollution Inside

There are some common sense steps you can take to keep pollutants out. Do we need to tell you not to smoke in the house? Simply removing your shoes at the door will leave contaminants outside. Think about what you stepped in today (pesticides, heavy metals, peoples's spit, to name a few). Now, picture your perfect little baby crawling through it. At least place a high quality mat at your doors that you can remove for cleaning. Carpets really collect stuff. Wall to wall, as luxurious as it looks, is very difficult to keep clean. Area rugs can be hung up outside and given a good beating. Save this task for your most frustrating days! Cooking produces many unburned hydrocarbons, especially when cooking with gas. Make sure you have a high quality exhaust fan and use it.

Make Mothballs a Thing of the Past

Get rid of mothballs if for no other reason than you really don't want to smell like your grandmother's closet. The active ingredient in mothballs is a pesticide. The EPA links short-term exposure to this pesticide to cataracts, liver and neurological damage. You won't have to buy all new sweaters if you store them in cedar lined closets and chests. Or use the cheaper option of cedar shavings or blocks. Moths are also repelled by a number of herbs, including cloves, fresh rosemary, eucalyptus, lavender, cinnamon sticks and bay leaves. Let your children put these ingredients in cheese cloth for you and tie it with a ribbon. Call it a craft and hang it in your closet for moth prevention.



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Burn Baby Burn

Think about all the candles you have burning. They probably are petroleum based and, even if you can't see it, they are producing a nasty black smoke. Ask your Green Irene Eco-Consultant to show you our line of soy-based candles. They are every bit as pretty but burn cleaner and longer. They contain no toxins and no petroleum as they are made 100% from pure soybean oil. They will burn as much as three times longer than regular candles.

Nothing is cozier than a roaring fire. Many people find, however, that a wood burning fire in their home contributes greatly to their allergy symptoms. This is an area where you will have to weigh atmosphere against air quality. If you can't give up that "real fire feel", make sure you have your fireplace inspected, cleaned and maintained. Call a chimney sweep every couple of years for an outside inspection and thorough cleaning.

Testing for Indoor Pollution

Your Green Irene Eco-Consultant can provide home testing kits (where the sample is sent to a lab). These kits can measure the level of dust, mold spores, dander, carcinogenic fibers like asbestos, pollen, bacteria and allergens in the air your family breathes. This information will enable you, and your local Green Irene Eco-Consultant, to focus your resources on projects which may be most useful, such as a duct cleaning.

Once It Is In, How Do I Get It Out?

To continually clean the air in your whole home, consider an electrostatic furnace filter. These filters are permanent, instead of those throwaway fiberglass screens that we forget to change anyway. They are washable and easy to install and clean. They remove much smaller particles than the old filters and are better at controlling bacteria, mold, viruses and pollen. Your Green Irene Eco Consultant carries a high quality electrostatic filter. We also carry specialty air filtration

systems that are certified to remove 99.97% of airborne particles. These stand alone systems contain medical grade HEPA filters which are regarded as the best form of air filtration devices available today. HEPA stands for High-Efficiency Particulate Arrestance. HEPA filters are defined as air-cleaning devices that have a proven minimum removal efficiency of 99.97% of particles in the air 0.3 microns and larger. Green Irene sells the very system that was chosen by FEMA and the Red Cross to address the serious air quality concerns in post 9/11 New York.

If you don't have mold allergies, houseplants have been proven to freshen your indoor air. Spider plants and peace lilies are effective for removing carbon dioxide. Ficus and aloe vera remove certain off-gases like formaldehyde and benzene. These pollutants are commonly found in paint, varnish, insulation, particle board, pressed wood and adhesives. Let these plants do what they do best, suck bad stuff out of the air. Put the aloe in your kitchen and it will do double duty as burn cream.

23,040 Breaths a Day—So Make Them Good Ones

You may not be able to control your children's behavior, but you do have control over the quality of the air they are breathing. There are services and products that your Green Irene Eco-Consultant can sell or recommend to help improve your indoor air quality. Together you can develop a plan to make the air in your home as healthful as possible. The average human takes 23,040 breaths a day. Make sure they are as clean as they can be!

Featuring our Green Home and Office Makeovers, GO GREEN Workshops and over 100 of the best green products available. Your local Green Irene will be there to be that Green Friend you wish you had, and can give you the advice you need to move your family toward a more healthy, green, low-impact lifestyle.

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