

Breathing Easy

IMPROVE INDOOR AIR QUALITY



FAR LEFT: American Clay Natural Earth Plaster uses natural clay, recycled, reclaimed aggregates and vibrant natural pigments in its product, which is non-dusting, mold and fade resistant, moisture and sound controlling and easy to repair. Photo by Addison Doty

LEFT: Go green with Mohawk's SmartStrand carpet made with DuPont Sorona renewably sourced polymer. Almost 40 percent of Sorona is made from renewable resources. This carpet offers durability and stain protection, while also making less of an environmental impact.

For most of us, when we think of air quality, we think of the smog that settles on our city numerous days, weeks and months during the course of a year. We think of the deterioration of the ozone and increasing heat island and how those affect our ability to breathe. There are very few of us who haven't recognized an increase in respiratory issues or sinus/allergy issues over the past few years. So what can we do about the quality of the air we breathe? This article focuses on the quality of air where we live and work.

To get a startling visual, sketch a floor plan of the various rooms in your house. Then, do the same thing for your office space. Once you have the areas defined, such as the bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchen and living space, put the approximate number of hours that you and your children spend in those spaces each day. Now add all of those numbers up and multiply them by 365. This number represents how many hours a year you spend in the space.

Stop for a second and think about that. Of all of the spaces that we breathe the air, we spend the most amount of time breathing the air inside our homes and offices, but the quality of the air in these spaces might not necessarily be the best.

It's time to consider making some simple changes that can greatly affect your air quality. For example, have you ever noticed that when you put new carpet in a room or paint a wall, you get a headache? Sometimes your sinuses shut down and you find it difficult to sleep at night. This condition may last days, weeks and, in some cases, months. What is going on? Many of the products that cover our floors, walls and ceilings contain volatile organic compounds. These VOCs have a toxic level — varying with product and quantity — that cause contamination of air space. In other words, we create serious air quality issues by installing these products.

The good news is that the green market has acknowledged this issue, and now lines of products are available that achieve pretty much whatever decorative look you as a consumer want with low or no VOCs. The Internet has a wealth of knowledge when trying to find green products. When you search for a specific product, many hits will appear.

Make sure to really do your homework and understand what makes the product green.

When adding color to your walls, it's optimal to choose a nontoxic paint with zero VOCs, which will normally cost around \$30 a gallon. This is about the cost of a gallon of paint with toxins, so why not make a healthier choice? Brands such as Benjamin Moore, Duron and Sherwin-Williams carry low-VOC paint options, and these companies can help you find a paint that will not only look beautiful on the walls, but also make your space healthier.

My favorite green product on the market today is American Clay Natural Earth Plaster (www.americanclay.com). It is a wall texture manufactured in Santa Fe, N.M., and is available locally at Southwest Building Products in Houston, New Living in Rice Village, Olde World Exteriors in Conroe and Green Builders Source in Spring. American Clay Natural Earth Plasters are non-dusting, mold and fade resistant, moisture and sound controlling and easy to repair. American Clay uses natural clay, recycled and reclaimed aggregates and vibrant natural pigments. If you can only choose one thing to do to improve the air quality in your spaces, then this is the one to choose.

Recycled carpet, bamboo floors and stained concrete are other excellent choices to achieve better air quality within the home or office because these options reduce the VOCs that are released into a space. It is important to find products that do not off-gas. Carpets that are created using recycled materials perform the same as carpets created using new material, often with the added benefits of increased stain resistance and improved indoor air quality. Also, the manufacturing of recycled content carpet produces fewer emissions than ordinary carpet. Check into Mohawk for its line of green carpets, Teragren for its wonderful wood floor selections and SoyCrete for its eco-friendly concrete stain.

Think about the power of your choice when it comes to air quality and the safety of your home and office. Give these products a try. Your nose and lungs will thank you.

