



Gasp-worthy perils of bad indoor air - and what you can do about them

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(BPT) - Cooler weather is on the way. You might think the seasonal demise of pollen-spewing flora, coupled with more time spent indoors, means allergy and asthma sufferers – not to mention the rest of us – can expect to breathe easier. Not so – if the air inside your home or office is polluted.

Indoor pollutant levels can actually be two to five times worse – and sometimes more than 100 times worse – than what's outside your house, according to the [Environmental Protection Agency](http://www.epa.gov/region1/communities/indoorair.html) (<http://www.epa.gov/region1/communities/indoorair.html>). When temperatures dip, Americans tend to spend more time inside and homes stay closed up as we attempt to keep warm, heated air inside. Exposure to indoor air pollution can cause a host of health problems, and it can be especially worrisome for people with existing respiratory concerns. What's more, bad air can even cause damage to your home.

Here are four gasp-worthy problems that can stem from poor indoor air quality, and simple ways you can deflate the risk to your health and home:

1. It can make you sick.

Indoor pollutants from radon (a naturally occurring gas) to dust, and volatile organic compounds (from furnishings and wall paint) to household chemicals and cleansers, have been associated with a number of health concerns. While the link between indoor air quality and respiratory ailments may be obvious, some of the other potential health effects are not.

Other problems associated with poor indoor air quality range from headache, nausea and dizziness to fatigue, dry eyes and skin, fatigue, fever and even hearing loss.

What you can do:

Take steps to remove stale, polluted air from inside your home or office. Good ventilation can make your home more comfortable and healthier. Opt to use a skylight for ventilation while you also reap the benefits of natural light. Energy Star-qualified solar powered fresh air skylights, like those made by Velux, can provide passive ventilation and abundant natural light. Passive ventilation through the

natural chimney effect of skylights is a great way to remove fumes, odor and humidity from kitchens and bathrooms, and freshen air in other living areas of the home. What's more, adding an energy-efficient, remote-controlled solar powered fresh air skylight complete with solar blinds can qualify you for a federal tax credit of 30 percent off the installation and equipment costs. Visit www.veluxusa.com (<http://www.veluxusa.com>) to learn more.

2. It can damage your home.

Excess moisture is one of the most damaging aspects of poor indoor air quality. Humidity not only creates breathing difficulty for people with existing respiratory problems, but it can promote the growth of mold and mildew, too, as well as lead to structural rot throughout the home.

Mold can be a major problem, causing significant health woes. If mold is present in your home, you may need to undertake costly repairs to remove it. What's more, moisture can cause rot in areas of the home you can't immediately see, such as inside walls, around windows or door frames and in the attic. Rot weakens a home's structural integrity and may also require expensive repairs.

What you can do:

Always run vent fans in bathrooms and kitchens when you'll be generating humidity. Supplement mechanical venting with passive airflow from fresh air skylights. If you live in a particularly damp climate, consider installing a dehumidifier on your heating, ventilation and cooling system to remove excess moisture from the air inside your home. Be vigilant for signs of mold and have any problems handled by a professional. For more tips on controlling condensation visit the [Velux America](http://www.veluxusa.com/morevelux/news/news_media/features/tips_condensation_article.aspx?keywords=Condensation&resNum=2) (http://www.veluxusa.com/morevelux/news/news_media/features/tips_condensation_article.aspx?keywords=Condensation&resNum=2) site.

3. It can cost you your job.

Poor indoor air quality can affect your job performance. A [National Institutes of Health report](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15330777) (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15330777>) cites a study in which researchers found that reducing indoor air pollution can improve workers' performance. In fact, researchers found differences of 6 percent to 9 percent, leading them to conclude that it's probably more cost effective for a business to reduce indoor pollutants than to increase the supply of outdoor air in a building.

What you can do:

If your performance at work suffers, it's not unthinkable that an employer might look for a more energetic employee. Discuss concerns about indoor air quality with your company's human resources team and ask what's being done to ensure good air quality in your office. In your own space, consider environment-enhancing steps, including an ionizing air freshener, a desk lamp that mimics natural light and potted plants that can act as natural air fresheners.

4. It can contribute to higher energy bills.

Many of the pollutants that irritate your lungs and sinuses can also stress your home's HVAC system by clogging filters. Clogged air filters force your heating and cooling systems to work harder to achieve their purpose. The harder they work, the more energy they consume. EnergyStar.gov says a buildup of dirt in a home's HVAC system is the top source of inefficient operation and system failure. If your HVAC system is 10 years old or more, it may already be less efficient than a newer model, and indoor air pollutants can decrease its efficiency even more.

What you can do:

Regularly change your HVAC system's air filters. Set a reminder on your smartphone to prompt you when it's time to change the filter. If your HVAC system is older, consider upgrading it. EnergyStar.gov says upgrading to a newer, more efficient system could save you as much as \$200 a year in heating and cooling costs.