

Cleaning Products and Toxins

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Household and cleaning products—including soaps, polishes, and grooming supplies—often contain harmful chemicals. Even products advertised as “green” or “natural” may contain ingredients that can cause serious health problems. Some products can release dangerous chemicals, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs). VOCs are gases that are emitted into the air from products or processes. Some are harmful by themselves and others react with other gases and form other air pollutants after they are in the air. Some of the more familiar VOCs include benzene, formaldehyde, and toluene.

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Indoor Sources of VOCs

- Building materials such as: paint, varnishes and finishes, caulks and sealants, adhesives, flooring, carpet, and pressed wood products
- Home & personal care products such as: cleaners and disinfectants, furniture, pesticides, air fresheners, cosmetics and deodorants, fuel oil and gasoline



Outdoor Sources of VOCs

- Gasoline
- Diesel emissions
- Wood burning
- Oil and gas extraction and processing
- Industrial emissions

Harmful Effects of VOCs

Health effects of VOCs include: eye, nose, and throat irritation; headaches; loss of coordination and nausea; and damage to the liver, kidney, and central nervous system. Some VOCs have been known to cause cancer in animals and are suspected or known to cause cancer in humans.

Symptoms associated with exposure to VOCs include: allergic skin reaction, difficulty breathing, visual disturbances, memory impairment, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and dizziness.

Protecting Yourself and Your Home from VOCs

- Look for items that state “Low VOCs” on the label.
- Throw away unused or little used containers safely. Buy in quantities you will use.
- Never mix household products unless directed on the label.
- Always follow manufacturers’ directions when using household and cleaning products.
- Don’t smoke and keep all buildings smoke free. Tobacco smoke contains VOCs among other carcinogens.
- Open windows and add a fan to pull the indoor air outside while you're using products with high VOCs. Increasing the amount of fresh air in your home will help reduce the concentration of VOCs indoors.
- Let new carpet or new building products air outside to release VOCs before installing them.
- Don’t store products with VOCs indoors, including garages connected to the building.
- Make sure your office or school ventilation systems are working effectively to reduce VOCs produced by printers and copiers.
- Keep exposure to perchloroethylene emissions from newly dry-cleaned clothing to a minimum.

<http://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/indoor/indoor-air-pollutants/volatile-organic-compounds.html>

<https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/volatile-organic-compounds-impact-indoor-air-quality>