

The Household Toxic Tour: Living Rooms

The smell of new **carpets** or freshly **painted** walls is actually chemical fumes! Many office carpets emit a chemical called 4-phenylcyclohexene, which is found in the latex backing used in some carpets. This chemical is thought to be one of the chemicals responsible for "sick" office buildings. Carpets may also emit benzene, which is known to cause cancer, leukaemia, anaemia, weakening of the immune system and can damage the developing foetus. Benzene is toxic if it is breathed in, makes skin contact or is swallowed.



Carpets also catch air pollution from the home, which has settled on the carpet. Carpet cleaners and deodorisers themselves contain toxic chemicals which may leave a residue on the carpet. There is a possible link between carpet cleaners and Kawasaki Disease, which is a children's disease which leads to acquired heart disease. As young children often crawl and lie down on carpets they are greater risk of being exposed to chemical fumes from carpets.

Even the **furnishings** of the typical home can be harmful. Fabrics that are labeled "wrinkle-resistant" are usually treated with a formaldehyde resin. These include no-iron sheets, curtains and even clothing. Children can inhale formaldehyde from the fabric finish that provides a "permanent press" quality to new fabrics and draperies, and they can absorb it through their skin from touching treated clothing or bedding for extended periods of time.

Inhaling formaldehyde fumes can cause respiratory problems and asthma-like symptoms, such as breathlessness, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing and/or chest tightness. Repeated exposures may cause bronchitis, with symptoms of cough and shortness of breath. Formaldehyde may be linked to cancer of the nose and throat in humans. Test animals exposed to formaldehyde fumes have developed nasal cancer. (It is also known as Formalin, Methanal, Methyl aldehyde, Methylene oxide, Morbicide acid and Oxymethylene.)

Scotchguard was taken off the market in 2000 after it became public that it contained a chemical (PFOS), which emits toxic emissions. PFOS has been linked to hormonal problems and asthma attacks.

Incense sticks have been linked to cancer, asthma and dermatitis (a skin rash). One study reported that foetus or nursing infants whose parents burned incense had a higher chance of getting leukaemia (a cancer of the blood organs). Carbon monoxide, benzene (which can cause cancer, leukaemia and damage the developing foetus) and fine particles ("particulates") are also released when incense is burnt.