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For more energy information, go to <http://energy.tennessee.edu>.

Indoor Air Quality

We usually think of air pollution as an outdoor problem – car exhaust and smokestacks and such. Surprisingly, the air you breathe in your own home may be even more polluted than outside air. Home indoor air pollutants can cause health problems, even if you are exposed to some pollutants for a short time. Symptoms range from allergic reactions (sneezing, coughing, watery eyes) to headaches, nausea, and fatigue. Some pollutants have even been linked to cancer and other serious illnesses.

**Gases and particles from fuel-burning appliances** can pollute the air in your home. No matter the fuel source – natural gas, propane, kerosene, wood or coal – all combustion appliances have the potential to release harmful gases such as carbon monoxide into your home. Wood-burners can also introduce irritating smoke and ash particles. Always closely follow installation and operating instructions for furnaces, water heaters, wood stoves, ranges, clothes dryers, space heaters, and fireplaces, and keep these appliances in good working order. If you have any combustion appliance, it is recommended that you install a carbon monoxide detector. For more details, read the *Home Energy Efficiency Fact Sheet on Carbon Monoxide and Gas Appliances*.

**Biological pollutants** include mold, mildew, bacteria, fungi, dust mites, pollen and animal dander. These microscopic pollutants often cause allergic reactions and can trigger asthma attacks. You can't eliminate them entirely, but you can keep their numbers down with adequate ventilation and regular cleaning. Use a vacuum with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. Minimize dampness by venting the clothes dryer and kitchen and bathroom fans to the outdoors – not to the crawl space, basement, or attic. Be sure there are vents in the attic and crawl space to the outside. Regularly clean humidifiers and evaporation trays in air conditioners and refrigerators. And for even more tips on controlling moisture, read the *Home Energy Efficiency Fact Sheet called Controlling Condensation in the Home*.

**Asbestos** is a mineral fiber often found in many products such as pipe insulation in older homes. However, until the late 1970s, it was also used to make floor tiles, roof and siding shingles, thermal insulators, and other fire-retardant, insulating building materials. Asbestos is harmful only when disturbed, usually during remodeling jobs. Inhaling its tiny fibers can cause lung and abdominal cancer years after the exposure. If your house contains an asbestos product in good shape, it is probably best to leave it alone because it only causes harm if the fibers become airborne. If it is deteriorating or must be repaired or removed, contact a professional for advice before disturbing.



