

# The Sensible Environmentalist

## Indoor Air Quality Puts Health at Risk

(NAPSA)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**

**Could the air in my home be making me sick?**

It's possible. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, indoor air can be up to 10 times more polluted than the air outside, even in the most industrialized cities. This poses a significant health risk—especially when



**Dr. Moore**

you consider that most of us spend at least 12 hours a day in our homes—which is why the EPA has listed indoor air quality as one of its top five environmental issues.

Part of the problem is that we've become increasingly efficient at sealing our homes to save energy, which has the unfortunate side effect of trapping pollutants inside. Proper ventilation is essential for diluting emissions and transporting them outdoors.

Most people don't realize how many sources of pollution there are in a typical home—from chemicals in cleansers and solvents, to mold, tobacco smoke, mites, dander and pollen. There are also what's known as "combustion" pollutants, produced when fuels are burned in fireplaces, furnaces, stoves and other appliances. These include (among others) carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide.

Depending on the pollutant and level of exposure, health effects may appear immediately

or over the long term, and can range from irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, to headaches, fatigue, heart disease and cancer. Whether someone gets sick depends on their age—children and the elderly face the greatest risk—and their overall health.

The best way to improve indoor air quality is to eliminate the sources of pollution. Relatively simple ways to do this include using chemicals outdoors or in a ventilated workspace, washing bedding and drapes regularly, choosing natural materials such as wood over carpets and preventing mold with a few well-placed dehumidifiers. For combustion pollutants, venting is essential. But, given the space limitations of this column, I suggest that anyone serious about making improvements visit the EPA ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)) and Green Building Initiative ([www.thegbi.org](http://www.thegbi.org)) Web sites for more detailed information.

Pollutants in your home have a direct effect on the health and well-being of your family. Fortunately, with so many common sense options, anyone can improve their indoor air quality and make their home more livable.

*Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to [Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com](mailto:Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com).*