

Shades of Green

Shades of Green: Healthy Indoor Improvements

GREENTIPS:

- What exactly are VOCs? They are organic chemical compounds that have high enough vapor pressures under normal conditions to significantly vaporize and enter the atmosphere. They're considered a factor in indoor air quality issues such as sick building syndrome. VOCs encompass a wide range of carbon-based molecules, such as aldehydes, ketones, and other light hydrocarbons. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines a VOC as any organic compound that participates in a photoreaction.
- VOCs have detrimental effects far beyond those you experience at home. They create toxic by-products in production and pose health threats for workers who install them. Released into the environment, VOCs build up ground level ozone (smog) and also contribute to water pollution.
- Choose water-based and natural paints and finishes instead of petrochemicals (like polyurethane). This will lessen environmental damage, resource depletion, and oil dependency.
- Solvents are key contributors to VOCs at home. Reduce their use, ventilate well, and store outside.
- Low or non-VOC paints are not expensive or hard to find. They're available from most major manufacturers at virtually the same prices as standard oil or latex paints.
- Watch out for formaldehyde in cabinets and furniture. It's contained in particleboard and in glues used to add wood or laminate veneers. Avoid those if you can, but otherwise be sure to seal them with a low- or non-VOC coating.
- Look for ratings when you shop for low- and non-VOC paints. The EPA sets national standards, and so do these private sector and trade groups: Greenguard, Green Seal, Scientific Certification Systems, Master Painter's Institute (MPI) Green Performance Standards. Greenguard focuses on indoor air quality. Green Seal and MPI also look at a paint's covering effectiveness, durability, and washability.
- Natural wood finishes perform well to protect wood. Instead of high-VOC paints and polyurethane use: linseed oil, orange oil, tung oil, carnauba wax, rosemary oil, beeswax, pine resin, penofin, and shellac.
- Earth plaster for walls and ceilings uses natural clays and pigments, along with recycled and reclaimed aggregates. Earth plasters are non-dusting, mold and fade resistant, moisture controlling, non-toxic, and easy to install or repair.
- Milk paint is a non-toxic, fade-resistant paint made from milk protein (casein), clay, lime, and earth pigments. Used for centuries, it has now returned to favor as an environmentally friendly alternative available commercially. Or make it yourself from recipes available online!

GREENSOURCES:

- From About.com:
Low VOC and alternative paints, a comprehensive article
http://homerepair.about.com/od/interiorhomerepair/ss/low_voc_paint_6.htm
- From the Environmental Protection Agency:
Introduction to Indoor Air Quality: Volatile Organic Compounds
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/voc.html>
Remodeling and VOCs
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/homes/hip-vocs.html>
- From “Green Basics” column of treehugger.com:
What are VOCs? Where are they found? How do you avoid them?
<http://www.treehugger.com/files/2008/03/green-basics-volatile-organic-compounds-vocs.php>
“Green Paint” Alternatives
http://www.treehugger.com/files/2007/04/ask_treehugger_13.php
- From How Stuff Works.com:
Low-VOC Paint, VOC-free Paint and Other Alternatives (what to look for when buying)
<http://home.howstuffworks.com/low-voc-paint2.htm>
- From Healthy Child.org:
Formaldehyde in plywood and particleboard, and how to avoid it by using safer alternatives
http://healthychild.org/resources/article/a_sane_home_in_a_plywood_particleboard_pressure_treated_wood_world/
- The Greenguard Environmental Institute:
Certifies low-emitting products for indoor air quality
www.greenguard.org

GREENTALK:

If the Shades of Green column moves you to try something new and greener, the Environment Committee encourages you to share your questions and experiences with other Town residents via the [Townneighbors listserv](#).