

# 12 | HEALTHY HOMES AND ENVIRONMENT

# EDMONTON'S GREEN HOME GUIDE

## Healthy Indoor Spaces are Important for Edmontonians

Edmontonians spend a great deal of time indoors, particularly in winter, so it's important to make our indoor spaces as healthy as possible.

## Smart Product Choices Reduce Environmental Impacts

Using local, recycled and non-toxic products and materials can reduce environmental impacts of transportation, material harvesting and processing and toxic environmental emissions. That's better for the environment and better for you.

## What Makes a Home Healthy? Here's What to Look for:

- » When looking at a home on the resale market, be aware that depending on the age of the home, some potentially toxic compounds may have been used in its construction like lead paint, asbestos and urea formaldehyde foam insulation. It can be difficult to identify the presence of these substances without hiring an expert. If it's known by the seller, it must be disclosed at the time of sale.
- » For new homes, look for low-VOC paints, adhesives and flooring (Green Seal, Green Label, or equivalent labels). Also look for rapidly renewable or recycled materials like bamboo flooring or recycled glass tile. Ask if the wood (including bamboo) is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which means it comes from sustainably managed forests.
- » A healthier home uses low-VOC paints, glues and flooring materials, with ecolabels such as Green Seal or Green Label for flooring. It's important to note that VOCs are in many things, and the products brought into the home after you move in can also contribute to indoor air-quality issues.
- » A healthy home has a heat recovery ventilator which delivers filtered fresh air into bedrooms and living rooms while removing contaminated air from the bathrooms and kitchen. To learn more, please refer to the heat recovery ventilator (HRV) details listed in the **Ventilation Information** section.
- » Look for healthy amounts of natural lighting in all areas that are regularly occupied.

## Make Healthy Product and Material Choices for Your Home

A healthy home is free of toxins, provides plenty of fresh air and lets lots of daylight in. Healthier product and material choices can reduce the toxins that potentially accumulate in your indoor environment, cut down on odours and provide a more pleasant living space that can enhance the value of your home.



## GREEN FACTS AND TIPS: CREATING A HEALTHIER HOME

### Non-Toxic Products

The easiest way to keep indoor air quality toxin-free is to avoid bringing toxins into the home in the first place. Be aware that many types of carpets, paints, solvents, glues and other building materials used in the home contain toxins such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Make sure the indoor building materials are low-VOC or no-VOC. Look for paint or adhesive products certified by Green Seal, GREENGUARD, or Master Painters Institute (MPI). For carpets, look for the Carpet and Rug Institute's Green Label or equivalents.

### How to Test Carpets and Other Floor Coverings for Toxicity

1) Get a small sample of the material and place it in a clean glass jar; 2) Cover the jar and set it in a warm place, such as a sunny window, for at least an hour; 3) Open the jar and test for the presence or intensity of odours, which indicate possible toxicity. Bear in mind that you're testing a small piece of sample. Expect a proportionate increase in odour from the full piece of floor covering. (Source: CMHC.)

### Ventilation Systems

Ventilation is a good way to enhance the air quality of your home. Air contaminants with known health effects can occur in homes from a variety of sources including formaldehyde, volatile organic compounds and radon. When the weather is fine, ventilation is a simple matter of opening the windows. However, in the colder months, a ventilation system is needed to refresh the indoor air. A heat recovery ventilation (HRV) system includes filtration media that can remove gases from the home, while reusing the heat in the old air to heat the home. Ventilation systems like HRVs are needed in air-tight homes with EnerGuide ratings of about 80 or higher.



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## Daylight and Views

Homes with abundant daylight create pleasant indoor environments and can contribute to the well-being of occupants. However, making sure that the home doesn't lose too much heat in winter may require using triple-paned glass or other strategies.

## Recycled Materials

Using building materials with recycled content reduces the environmental impact of home construction or renovation. Many types of basic building materials—wood products, steel, concrete and drywall with high recycled content—are readily available. Rapidly renewable products such as those made with FSC bamboo can also reduce environmental impacts. Purchasing FSC bamboo ensures that the bamboo is being regenerated. Even rapidly renewable materials can be depleted if not harvested sustainably.

## Local Manufacturers

Using building materials and products made in or near Edmonton supports the local economy and reduces the amount of energy used and greenhouse gases emitted in shipping.

## Durable Materials

Choosing durable building materials can add up to savings in the long run. Getting longer use out of building materials is good for the environment, too.

## Radon Testing

Radon is an odourless radioactive gas that occurs naturally in the environment. Naturally occurring radon arises from the breakdown of uranium, which is a common trace element in some natural geologic materials such as granite, shale, or phosphate minerals. Concentration levels vary from one house to another, even if they're similar and next door to each other. Testing for radon is simple and you can buy inexpensive radon test kits from a number of local retailers. To learn more about radon visit: [hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/radiation/radon/faq\\_fq-eng.php](http://hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/radiation/radon/faq_fq-eng.php)

## Eco-Labels

A number of organizations offer product certification programs. When choosing products or materials, always look for eco-labels such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified lumber and Green Seal paints. To learn more about these labels visit: [edmonton.ca/sustainablepurchasing](http://edmonton.ca/sustainablepurchasing) and click on Understanding the Environmental Logos in the related documents section.

