

# 10 tips

## to Improve Home Air Quality

We often think of air pollution as being an outside problem. But in fact, the air indoors (where people spend most of their time) can be more polluted than the air outside. Radon, lead, mold, carbon monoxide, chemicals, and pests are just some of the things found indoors that may impact your health and potentially damage your home.

**Following these simple tips can improve the air quality in your home environment, making it healthier for you and your family.**

- 1 Control Moisture to Prevent Mold and Building Rot.** Mold, caused by too much moisture, is a common allergen and has been linked to asthma. And, mold can cause significant structural damage to your home. Fix all leaks promptly and dry all wet areas quickly and completely. Keep your relative humidity level between 30-50% (purchase a hygrometer at your local hardware store). Vent high moisture areas such as kitchens, bathrooms, and laundry rooms directly to the outdoors.
- 2 Let the Fresh Air In.** Buildings are for people, and people need fresh air. Ventilate your home to let fresh air in and exhaust stale air and pollutants out. Actively use your operable windows, exhaust fans or whole-house mechanical ventilation. Add extra ventilation to high pollutant/moisture areas, such as kitchens, bathrooms, laundry rooms, and hobby areas.
- 3 Vacuum AT LEAST Once a Week.** Dust particles, allergens, and chemical residues can settle onto the surfaces of your home. Regular use of a good quality vacuum with a HEPA filter will remove these microscopic contaminants from the home.
- 4 Test Your Home for Radon.** Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer nationwide, and the #1 cause of lung cancer in nonsmokers. 1/3 of Maine homes likely have a radon problem. The only way to know for sure is to test. Contact the Maine Radiation Control Program at (800) 232-0842 for more information or visit [www.maineradiationcontrol.org](http://www.maineradiationcontrol.org) for tip sheets and lists of contractors.
- 5 Maintain Your Heating System and Avoid Combustion By-Products.** Burning anything, whether it's oil, gas, wood, food, or a candle, releases chemicals into the indoor air. All heating systems should be serviced on a regular basis by a licensed professional and vented to the outdoors. Avoid all unvented fuel-burning heating appliances, always vent cooking appliances, don't continuously burn candles, and never smoke indoors. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Contact your service provider for recommended cleaning and filter changes. Use high quality filters. Clean heat pump filters monthly.
- 6 Never Scrape or Sand Paint Without First Checking for Lead.** Lead is a poison that attacks the nervous system. 80% of Maine homes and apartments built before 1978 could have some lead paint in them. Young children (6 and under) have the greatest risk of being lead poisoned. Contact Maine Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at: 866-292-3474 or visit [www.maine.gov/dhhs/eohp/lead](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/eohp/lead) for more information.
- 7 Control Pests without Pesticides.** The health effects associated with pesticide exposure include irritation to the eyes, nose, and throat; damage to the central nervous system and kidneys; and for some, an increased risk of cancer. Strategies exist to control pests without using chemical pesticides. Contact the Maine Board of Pesticides Control (207) 287-2731 or visit [www.thinkfirstspraylast.org](http://www.thinkfirstspraylast.org) for more information.
- 8 Landscape Correctly.** Poor landscaping can allow both moisture and pests to enter your home. Place all plants at least 24" away from the home and away from all air intakes and exhaust vents. Use only non-woody mulch near foundation. Keep the earth always sloping away from the home.
- 9 Inspect Your Home Annually.** Just like people, your home needs an annual check-up. Take the time to thoroughly inspect your home inside and out. Look for stains, wet spots, condensation, insects, insect damage, peeling paint, roof integrity, and overgrown trees and plants. Look at the plumbing under sinks and in the basement, check around windows, doors, tubs, showers, sinks and toilets, inspect the roof and the attic, as well as the basement or crawlspace.
- 10 Ask Questions!** When hiring home services professionals, do the following:
  - Ask for **and** review the contractor's credentials & references
  - Ask how their work will affect your home environment
  - Obtain a contract for all work over \$3,000

For more information on indoor air quality, visit the website of the Maine Indoor Air Quality Council: [www.maineindoorair.org](http://www.maineindoorair.org).

