

# Green Decorating Tips to Protect Children & Pets

by Teresa Tocco-Davenport, CID, Green AP

We spend 90 percent of our time indoors, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and sadly too many of us spend that time wheezing, sneezing, coughing and scratching. The non-profit, Sustainable Furnishings Council attributes that discomfort to the fact that today air pollutants are 2 to 5 percent higher indoors than outside.

When the most vulnerable among us—our children and pets—are suffering, it's up to us to make the changes needed to ease their symptoms. Asthma affects 6.8 million children in this country, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Pediatrics says that, "Avoiding environmental allergens and irritants is one of the primary goals of good asthma management."

More dogs and cats are also suffering from allergies. Veterinarian Dr. Karen Becker, also a columnist for *The Huffington Post*, says, "Our pets are much more sensitive to airborne toxins than we are."

## WHAT'S TOXIC?

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are emitted as gases from certain solids or liquids. They exist in materials such as adhesives in press and composite woods, paints, finishes, fabric sealers and backings. The EPA reports that concentrations of many VOCs are consistently higher indoors (up to 10 times higher) than outdoors.

VOCs are broken down as follows:

- 21 percent carcinogens
- 12 percent reproductive toxins
- 44 percent odorants/irritants
- 23 percent other

## NON-TOXIC HOME DÉCOR

The good news is that today there are green solutions in furnishings, flooring,

window treatments and finishes. Many people are familiar with using hardwood flooring versus carpeting. It's long lasting, has minimal chemicals and is easier to dispose of. What may be unfamiliar, yet attractive and a green option, is bamboo and cork flooring.

**Bamboo** is a natural product. Its hues are naturally inherent to material. Additionally, it is hard wearing, environmentally sound, renewable, recyclable, biodegradable and composed of complex fibers that don't absorb moisture as easily as wood.

**Cork** is anti-microbial, resistant to mold and mildew, comprised of renewable natural material, environmentally friendly, fire and termite resistant, and does not release toxic gases on combustion.

## NATURAL CARPETING

For those who enjoy the warmth of wall-to-wall carpeting on bare feet, two groundbreaking methods of manufacturing carpet have been introduced in the last few years. One uses corn sugar and another uses recycled and processed, discarded bottles. It's nice to have options.

## MADE IN THE SHADE

An alternative to fabric shades are natural-woven shades made from 100 percent natural, renewable resources: bamboo, grasses and reeds. Bamboo is actually not a wood. It's a fast growing grass that can be made into highly durable, wood-like products, including flooring and shades. No harsh chemicals are used. Treated in natural, chemical-free processing, the manufacturing of these shades involves high intensity heat, purifying the product to the highest degree. Natural-woven shades also have insulating properties that provide savings on heat and cooling, especially if lined. An added bonus is that they are easy to clean.

Also, for those that are not fans of wood window treatments, there are green fabric window treatments, made with sustainable fibers, organic fibers and recycled fibers.

Paint finishes have always been a concern and manufacturers have been diligent in creating products that reduce VOCs. There are paints today that are 100 percent acrylic resins with zero VOC, no discernible smell, that are fast drying, eco-friendly and tinted with no VOC colorants.

It's difficult for furniture stores to know the exact components in the furniture they sell, but store personnel should share with you what they do know and be able to investigate further if more information is needed.

## LOOK FOR THIS LABELING

Here's the descriptive content the Sustainable Furnishings Council advises you to seek from furniture manufacturers to ensure you're sitting on safer products:

- Natural fabrics versus synthetic fabrics
- Organically grown fibers
- Non-foam cushioning
- Latex foam versus polyurethane foam, especially wrapped in wool (making it flame retardant)
- Water-based finishes versus benzene
- Leathers processed under EU law
- Low-impact dyes
- Oeko-Tex and GOTS certifications
- Greenguard certification
- Forest Stewardship Council certification
- Furniture made in the USA

Awareness of green decorating options allows us to alter our purchases to reduce the toxins in our homes and improve our health.

*Teresa Tocco-Davenport, founder and president for 10 years of Absolute Living Toxic, LLC, is a Certified Interior Decorator (CID), and Accredited Professional in Sustainability through the Sustainable Furnishings Council with a Green AP designation. She is also a Best of Houzz 2014 award winner for excellent customer service and design knowledge. She's also a repeat presenter at the Philadelphia Home Show. For more information, call 856-294-9173 or visit [AbsoluteLivingToday.com](http://AbsoluteLivingToday.com).*