

# Fixing Up Your Home? Here's a Quick and Dirty CLEAN GREEN GUIDE for HOME REPAIR

- An Environmental Action by *Green Sangha*\*

## **Re-Painting?**

**Caution!:** Commercial paints contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs) which are a main source of indoor air pollution. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, indoor air is three times more polluted than outdoor air. A pound of paint usually contains up to 350 parts VOC, a large percentage of dangerous solvent that is usually responsible for the "new paint smell."

### ***Green Suggestion:* Buy low or non-VOC paints.**

Latex based paints have lower levels of VOCs than alkyd paints. Look for paints that have VOC levels of 150 gm/l or lower. Natural paints, with only natural materials (such as plant dyes, linseed oil, milk protein), are a safe alternative that allow surfaces to breathe freely (vs. creating the impermeable film that chemical paints do which can lead to mold and fungus growth). Usually paints that are less saturated with color carry fewer VOCs.

*Non or low-VOC commercial paints:* Benjamin Moore Eco Spec, AFM Safecoat and SafeChoice products, Hominy, AGLAIA Natural paints

## **Re-Carpeting?**

**Caution!:** When buying new carpet, consider the product's durability, level of VOC emissions, manufacturing processes and materials. Old carpet sent to landfills each year cover an area greater than New York City.

### ***Green Suggestion:* Buy undyed, natural, woven fiber carpets that are CRI certified.**

1) FACE FIBERS: Carpet made of natural fibers (e.g., wool, jute, sisal, coir, seagrass) are biodegradable and often made from renewable resources. Synthetic fibers which are all petroleum products (eg, nylon, polyester, polypropylene) may be more economical. If buying synthetic, certain nylon carpets offer recycling benefits. Buy undyed or vegetable dyed fibers (vs. fibers with toxic metallic dyes). 2) WOVEN vs TUFTED: Woven broadloom is constructed stronger than tufted carpet allowing for a twice as long life cycle (approx 15 years). While more expensive, woven carpet is easier to recycle because it does not have the backings of tufted carpet. 3) VOCs: Ventilation is recommended within the first 72 hours after installation to minimize indoor air pollution from new carpet VOC emission. For minimal off-gassing, buy carpets with no finish (such as stain repellents) and tack carpets down rather than gluing.

*Resources:* Earthweave Carpet Mills, Eco-Wise Environmental Products, Real Goods Trading Co., Planetary Solutions, Environmental Home Center, Interface, Greensage, Naturalich

## **Re-Flooring?**

**Caution!:** Increased use of solid timber for wood flooring and home remodeling has contributed to depletion of forestland. The average American consumes seven times as much commercial wood and paper as citizens in other countries, contributing to the loss of one football field of forestland every second.

***Green Suggestion:* Buy sustainable, eco-friendly flooring products.**

Ask for FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified products from your housing contractor or architect. Avoid wood products made from high-grade Mahogany, Rosewood, Lauan, Redwood, Sitka Spruce and other wood products from endangered forests. If desiring hardwood, consider recycled/reclaimed wood removed from old buildings and refinished. Consider use of bamboo flooring which can be sanded and refinished multiple times and is more moisture resistant than most hardwoods. Controlled bamboo forests produce as much hardwood flooring in 5 years as 40 years of hardwood forests. Cork flooring is also a renewable flooring resource, harvested from the bark of the cork tree which grows back completely in 9-14 years. True linoleum flooring is made, not of vinyl, but of natural materials (linseed oil, pine resin, cork flour, etc.). Also consider ceramic tile flooring made from recycled auto glass content.

## **Re-Heating?**

**Caution!:** Heating and cooling systems in the US emit over a half billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year and generate 24% of the nation's sulfur dioxide and 12% of the nitrogen oxides, contributing to global warming and acid rain.

### ***Green Suggestion:* Takes the following steps towards energy efficiency.**

1) Consider installing an energy-efficient heat pump which collects heat from the air, water or ground outside the home and concentrates it for use inside. It also works as an air conditioner and can trim 30-40% off the electricity used. 2) Check the air ducts, windows, and doors for leaks. Caulk, seal, and weatherstrip all seams, cracks, and openings to the outside. 3) Turn your thermostat back 10-15% for 8 hours or install an automatic setback or programmable thermostat. 4) Keep the fireplace damper closed unless using it. 5) Use a whole house fan to cool the house. If using an air conditioner, plant trees or shrubs to shade it. Don't place lamps or TV sets near your air conditioning thermostat. 6) Reduce water heating by using low-flow aerating showerheads and faucets, turning down the thermostat on your water heater, and insulating your water heater. 7) Install storm windows over single-pane windows or replace them with double-pane windows. Or, tape clear plastic film to the inside of your window frames during the cold months. 8) For new construction, reduce exterior wall air leaks by either installing house wrap, taping the joints of exterior sheathing, or comprehensively caulking and sealing the exterior walls. 9) When purchasing new appliances, look for the Energy Star label to ensure their energy efficiency.

## **How Can I Make a Difference?**

1. Employ these *Clean Green Guidelines* in your own home and distribute to friends.
2. Distribute stacks of these sheets within the community (e.g., to local contractors, real estate agents, home repair stores, etc.)
3. Pick a local business that does not carry eco-friendly products and a) write a letter, or b) speak directly with the owner about the importance of supplying such products.
4. Write to your representatives to endorse LEED certification for all new development. Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is a rating system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council to assess the environmental sustainability of building designs ([www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)).

(all above information was excerpted and reworked from among the following websites):  
greensage.com, certifiedproducts.org , betterbuilding.com, ecowise.com, [greenfloors.com](http://greenfloors.com),  
[ecohaus.com](http://ecohaus.com), coopamerica.org; solar.realgoods.com, [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov), enermodal.com,  
edutracks.com, [carpet-rug.com](http://carpet-rug.com), [airbrains.org/carpetresources.htm](http://airbrains.org/carpetresources.htm), [eere.energy.gov](http://eere.energy.gov),  
[greenseal.org/recommendations.htm](http://greenseal.org/recommendations.htm), motherearthnews.com., nari.org, greenbuild.org

**Local Resources:** [www.greenresourcecenter.org](http://www.greenresourcecenter.org) (EXCELLENT resource! Compares products and includes info.on *where* to buy them), Green Fusion Design Center (new green home repair and resource center, San Anselmo), Green Building Resource Exhibit at Marin County Civic Center in the Building Permit offices; Greensage Consulting (see above)

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\* *Green Sangha* is a spiritual community committed to environmental action. For more information please visit [www.GreenSangha.org](http://www.GreenSangha.org)