

HEALTHY HOME GUIDE



Developed by the Southwest MN Housing Partnership

Photos courtesy of the Milan Listening House and Kristi Fernholz

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INTRODUCTION

To keep your home healthy and to conserve natural resources, it is important that you clean and maintain their homes using green and healthy products and practices. This guide is meant to help you do that. It presents some of the things that you can do to keep your home clean, green, and healthy. Many of these things are easy to do, and all of them are worth the time and effort.

HOUSEKEEPING AND CLEANING

It's important to take care of your home, to keep it clean and pest-free, and to clean it using safe products. These steps will help protect your health and maintain a pleasant living environment. We have included recommendations on general housekeeping practices, cleaning products, and clothes cleaning.

General Housekeeping Tips

Wash any dirty dishes daily and clean kitchen surfaces with a damp cloth whenever they are dirty. Throw out and replace used sponges and cloths/rags if they are dirty or smelly.

Clean the grease filter on your stove's range hood when any grease builds up; about every 2-3 months. It should also be replaced annually.

If you see discoloration on surfaces (white, orange, green, brown, or black), see cracked or discolored grout, or smell a musty odor, it might be mold or mildew. Clean the areas with baking soda or borax.

Do not use bristly brushes or other abrasive products when cleaning, as they can leave scratch marks.

When using a cleaning product, read its label and follow the instructions for using and storing the product. Do not use harsh chemicals like bleach or ammonia for cleaning. Do not mix different cleaning products together (unless specifically recommended or unless they are non-reactive, non-toxic substances). Never mix chlorine and ammonia. Open the windows whenever there are odors, fumes from cleaning products or other chemicals, or excess moisture in your apartment. Also use a fan to help air out the room.

Cleaning Your Flooring

If you spill grease, juice, wine, mustard, coffee, tea, or milk: These items can be cleaned up with a solution of water & vinegar.

If you spill: nail polish, paint, lipstick, ink, or crayon: These items can be cleaned up with acetone or water and an alcohol based soap-free non-abrasive household cleaner.

If you spill gum or candle wax: These items can be cleaned up by allowing them to harden and then scraping them free with a rubber scraper.

If you spill hydrogen peroxide, bleach, hair dye, iodine, shoe polish, lacquers, adhesives: Remove them immediately and thoroughly clean the area. They will damage your flooring if left on it for longer than 10 minutes.

Use good quality entry and exit mats to help collect dirt, sand, grit, and oil that can otherwise be tracked onto your flooring. Do not use rubber or foam backed plastic mats as they may discolor the flooring.

Vinyl Flooring

At least once a week, sweep, dust, or vacuum the floor with the hard floor to prevent accumulation of dirt and grit that can scratch or dull the floor finish. Do not use the beater bar that is designed for carpet.

Damp mop your flooring whenever it starts to get dirty or sticky. You can use a mixture of vinegar and water or an appropriate household cleaning solution. Wipe up any spills or puddles of water immediately, since water can damage your floors. Remove stubborn stains carefully. Be careful not to scratch the flooring surface. Wipe clean with a damp cloth.

Never use: wax, polish, oil, detergents, oil soaps, steel wool, abrasive cleaners, or any type of buffing/polishing machine.

Carpet

The most important step in caring for your carpet is vacuuming it thoroughly and frequently, particularly in high-traffic areas. Walking on soiled carpet allows the soil particles to work their way below the surface of the pile where they are far more difficult to remove and can damage the carpet fibers. Frequent vacuuming removes these particles from the surface before problems occur. For rooms with light traffic, vacuum the carpet traffic lanes twice weekly and the entire area once weekly. In areas with heavy traffic, vacuum the carpet traffic lanes daily and the entire area twice weekly.

Remove as much of food spills as possible by scraping the carpet gently with a spoon or a dull knife. Absorb wet spills quickly by blotting repeatedly with white paper or white cloth towels. Always blot; never rub or scrub abrasively, as a fuzzy area may result. When blotting, work from the outer edge in toward the center of the spot to avoid spreading the spill. Rinse the cleaned carpet area with water to remove detergent residue that may become sticky and cause rapid re-soiling. Absorb any remaining moisture by placing several layers of white towels over the spot and weighing them down with a heavy object. This step is necessary even when the carpet does not seem particularly damp.

Please have your carpets professionally cleaned every 12-18 months to keep them looking great over time. Professional carpet cleaners understand the equipment, know the proper cleaning agents for the situation, and recognize the differences in fibers and carpet construction. Their cleaning equipment has more extraction power than the rental units available to individuals, and your carpet should dry more quickly.

Ceramic Tile

Wash ceramic tile with a damp mop at least once a week. You can use a mixture of vinegar and water or an appropriate store-bought cleaning solution to mop your tile. Please consult our cleaning solution section if you plan on using store-bought cleaning products.

Routine cleaners should never contain acids, vinegar, chlorines or ammonia, as these chemicals can damage and discolor the grout or the surface of the tile.

Cleaning your Clothes

Wash your clothes and bedding regularly. If the items are quite dirty, choose the hot water setting on the washing machine, to kill germs. When your laundry items are only slightly dirty, you can select the cold or warm water setting in order to save energy. Washing one big load of laundry is less expensive and uses less energy than two small loads.

Choose a laundry detergent that is labeled as phosphate-free, biodegradable, and/or non-toxic. Also consider selecting an unscented product.

Only a small amount of detergent is necessary; do not use more than the recommended amount. If your washing machine is front loaded, please be sure to use "High-Efficiency or HE-Formulated" laundry detergent. Also, be sure to keep the washing machine door open after each use to prevent mold or mildew.

Please clean the lint out of the dryer's lint filter after every load. This will help the dryer work better and it also prevents the lint from becoming a fire hazard.

CLEANING PRODUCTS

Cleaning your home is important because it helps remove harmful contaminants such as mold and bacteria. But many conventional cleaning products can also cause health problems. The use of toxic cleaning products can be a particular problem for people who have health conditions such as asthma or allergies or who have chemical sensitivities or weak immune systems.

Most household cleaners contain harsh chemicals that are not safe to touch and give off fumes that are not safe to breathe. Some cleaning products can cause headaches, dizziness, skin irritation, respiratory irritation and asthma, eye irritation or worse. Below are some inexpensive alternative household cleaning products that do not pose strong health hazards.

Household Cleaning Products

Many ordinary household items are effective for standard household chores and cleaning up many different stains.

Dishwashing Detergent:

Detergent solution: Mix mild liquid detergent with water (no more than 1/4 teaspoon of detergent to 32 ounces of water). A clear, non-bleach liquid dishwashing detergent is recommended. Do not use detergents that are cloudy or creamy because they may leave a sticky residue.

Baking Soda:

A baking soda and water paste can be as effective as standard commercial abrasive cleaners for getting stains out of clothes, cleaning kitchen appliances, cleaning pots and pans, deodorizing the garbage and refrigerator, and eliminating other household odors. When mixed with Borax, baking soda can replace expensive detergent for your automatic dishwasher. Baking soda is great deodorizer; you can use it to anywhere where you need deodorizing action.

Vinegar:

By mixing one part white vinegar with one part water you make yourself an all-purpose cleaner that is safe for you and your home. Just put the mixture in an empty spray bottle and use it on most hard surfaces in your home instead of a harsh chemical spray. Use on floors, toilets, sinks, showers, counters, and kitchen appliances. Any scent of vinegar will disappear after the surface has dried. Vinegar may also be used as a fabric softener in your laundry.

Lemons:

Lemon juice can be added to either vinegar or baking soda to increase its cleaning power. You can also use it to dissolve soap scum and hard water deposits. Keep in mind that lemon is a natural bleach, so when you are cleaning with it, test a hidden area to ensure it does not damage the color of the surfaces. As a natural bleach you can use it to treat stains, too.

Store Bought Cleaning Products

Use Non-toxic cleaners

Choose cleaning products labeled as non-toxic. Do not buy products with "Danger" or "Warning" labels. Look for products that are free of phosphates, EDTA (ethylene diaminetetra acetic acid or ethylene dinitrilotetraacetic acid) or NTA (nitrilotriacetic acid), petroleum, and nonylphenol ethoxylate, chlorine, and artificial fragrances and colors.

Look for the "Green Seal" or other certification proving a cleaner is environmentally-acceptable. A list of "Green Seal" products is available at: <http://www.greenseal.org/findaproduct/index.cfm>.

Use Concentrated Products

Use products that come in concentrated form to reduce the amount of packaging used. Buy products that are biodegradable or are sold in biodegradable packaging. After they are disposed of, they will breakdown without polluting the soil.

Cleaning products made of recycled content

Look for cleaning products made with recycled materials or packaged using recycled content. Do not forget to recycle packaging when you are done using it!

Products to avoid

Never use chlorine bleach or ammonia; both of these can cause major respiratory irritation. Hydrogen peroxide is a good alternative to chlorine bleach, but make sure to dilute it with water. Mix 1 part Hydrogen Peroxide with 11 parts water for a cleaning solution to use on walls, windows, toilets, showers, etc.

Also avoid most “anti-bacterial” and “anti-microbial” products; use of such products can cause germs to become resistant to antibiotics.

Avoid using most “air freshener” products, especially if their labels say that they contain para-dichlorobenzene. Ingredients like this can cause headaches and other health problems.

Also avoid using mothballs; instead, store wool items in plastic bags or airtight containers, and if there is a moth problem, you can kill the moth eggs by washing the affected garments in hot water or putting them in the freezer for a few days.

TRASH AND RECYCLING

Recycling

Recycling is one of the most simple and effective things that you can do for the environment. Before recycling bottles and cans, please rinse them out with a small amount of water. Please bring recyclables to your recycling bin as needed.

The materials that can be recycled are: paper, cardboard, aluminum beverage and food cans, all plastics except for plastic bags and foam products, and glass bottles and jars.

Hazardous Waste Disposal

Hazardous waste materials may not be thrown in the garbage or they will contribute to the contamination of the air, water, or soil. However, hazardous materials are accepted from households at no charge at the local hazardous waste facility. Your county’s hazardous waste facility is located at:

Hazardous waste materials include:

Household Products such as: Aerosol cans, metal polish, oven cleaners, furniture polishes, paints, bug spray.

Garage Materials such as: lighter fluid, kerosene, antifreeze, fuel, oil, solvents, turpentine, wax, caulk, glue, paint thinner batteries.

Other Materials such as: fluorescent light bulbs, moth balls, weed killers.

PEST CONTROL

It is important to keep your home free of pests (such as cockroaches, rodents, etc.), as pests can carry disease.

Please do not use toxic pesticide products, such as Raid spray. Most pesticides are poisons, and they are often poisonous to humans, as well as to pests. Studies have linked some pesticides to cancer, birth defects, neurological disorders, and immune system disorders, as well as allergies. As a general rule, avoid products that are labeled “Danger—Poison.”

The best strategy is to keep pests from coming into your home in the first place, rather than having to get rid of them later. Many pests are attracted by grease, sweets, other types of food, and standing water. If your home is clean and dry, it is not likely that pests will want to live there. The following are some specific steps that you can take to keep pests from finding food, water, or hiding places in your home.

Pest Prevention Tips

Keep your kitchen clean (counters, cabinets, sink, floors, stove, microwave, etc.). Clean up any open, unsealed food, and crumbs (wrap and seal any leftover food). Do not leave dirty dishes out overnight. Clean up spills or sticky substances from all surfaces. Be sure to clean up any grease with soapy water, and dry off any wet areas.

Sweep and mop regularly.

Place all dry pet food in airtight containers and clean up around your pet’s food and water bowls daily.

Rinse bottles, cans, and containers before putting them in the trash or recycling bin. Take your garbage and recyclables out to your dumpsters at least once a week.

Minimize clutter and paper piles that can provide hiding places for pests.

Bed Bug Prevention and Control

“Bed bugs” are small, nocturnal insects that feed on blood. They are about 1/4-inch long and 1/8-inch wide. They have flat, reddish-brown bodies with six legs, and after feeding, they become round and red. They give off a sweet, musty odor. Their eggs are white and very small, and their excrement appears as tiny brown or black spots. Bed bugs are typically found on mattresses, box springs and bed frames, clothing, bedding, furniture, or any dark cracks, seams, or crevices in walls or floors. They can travel through water pipes, wall voids, and ducts, and can spread from room to room. Some people who are bitten by them get itchy welts on their skin.

Preventing the Introduction of Bed Bugs

Do not take any items from another home that has bed bugs or has been treated for bed bugs. Do not purchase used bedding or mattresses and bring them into your home. The housing office strongly discourages the purchase of furniture at used furniture stores – as they may contain bed bugs (or bed bug eggs) that will infest your home, and may be costly to exterminate. If you buy any clothing from a thrift or “second-hand” store – it must be immediately washed in hot water and dried at a high temperature. Do not pick up furniture that is being thrown away or lying outside of a home and bring it to your home. If you visit relatives that may have bed bugs, check your bags, containers and luggage when you get home.

Getting Rid of Bed Bugs

If you are concerned that your home or possessions have bed bugs, do not throw any household items away until you have spoken with a pest-extermination professional. A plan for exterminating the bed bugs will be made, and you will receive special instructions (and help) in removing possessions infested with bed bugs.

HOW TO SAVE ENERGY AND WATER

Conserving energy and water resources benefits the environment in a variety of ways. For example, using less electricity reduces power plants emissions (from burning fossil fuels), which reduces air and water pollution, and that helps protect everyone's health. In addition, the less energy and water used in your home, the less money you will have to pay for these utilities.

Lighting

Turn off lights and any electronic equipment whenever you are leaving your home or when you do not need them to be on. Only use the amount of light you need. For example; when you are in your bedroom, it may make more sense to use a small wattage bedside lamp rather than the installed fixture on the ceiling.

When light bulbs burn out replace them with energy-efficient CFL or LED bulbs. Be careful not to break fluorescent CFL bulbs; they contain small amounts of mercury, which is a hazardous substance. Do not throw away fluorescent light bulbs. They can be recycled at the hazardous waste facility.

Heating and Cooling

Utilize your homes programmable thermostat. During winter months, the highest temperature that a thermostat needs to be set for is about 68-70 degrees when you are home and 55-57 degrees when you are not home. Do not leave the heat on when you have the windows open, (unless you just need to open the window to air out the room for a short time). Turn your ceiling fan on clockwise in the winter months. Wear warm clothes such as long pants, long sleeves, and socks.

During the summer months to conserve energy, set your thermostat to 75-78 degrees when you are home and 82-85 degrees when you are not at home. In the summer, turn off the air conditioning and open windows in the evening/night when the air temperature has dropped. Turn your ceiling fan on counterclockwise in the summer months. Only use fans when you are in the same room. Fans cool people, not rooms.

Water

When using a sink or the shower, do not run the faucet longer than is necessary for your task. Keep shower time to 10-15 minutes. When you turn a faucet off, make sure that it is all the way off.

When using the clothes washer, clean large loads. It takes less water to clean one large load as opposed to two small loads. Or, if it is an option on the washing machine, select a light-load setting for small loads. This will use less water than would be used for a full load.

When using the dishwasher, clean fairly full loads. Do not use the pre-rinse cycle on your dishwasher.

MAINTENANCE INSTRUCTIONS

Furnace and Thermostat

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, indoor air is two to five times more polluted than outdoor air. This can be a big problem if you suffer from allergies. There are a number of things that affect indoor air quality but an efficient furnace

filter is an important part of any strategy to improve indoor air quality. Change your furnace filters as often as needed, typically once a month in the summer and winter seasons.

It is a common misconception that it takes more energy to heat up a cold house than it does to keep a house warm all the time. Turning down the thermostat will always save energy, as will turning up the air conditioner temperature setting. If your concern is comfort, or having to wait for your house to heat up or cool down after you get home, program your thermostat to begin to heat or cool down your home 30-60 minutes before you get home.

Remember to change the batteries on the device yearly and to change the time during daylight savings time.

Electrical Box

An electrical box is located in your home. All of the circuits within your home are fed from this panel and are labeled accordingly. When a circuit is tripped, flip the switch pertaining to that circuit back over so that it matches the rest of the switches in your electrical box. This should restore electrical current to that circuit.

Smoke & Carbon Monoxide Detectors

If your alarm sounds evacuate immediately until emergency personnel arrive.

Symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning: headache, dizziness, nausea, and irregular breathing. CO exposure can be immediately life threatening.

Maintenance: Check your smoke and CO alarms yearly and change the batteries. If an alarm starts chirping that means that the backup battery is low and needs to be changed. To Test your alarms, hold in the Test button, and it will trigger the alarm.

Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs)

GFCIs may have been installed in your kitchen and bathrooms. GFCIs are designed to protect you from electrical shock by interrupting a household circuit when there is a difference in the currents. When the circuit has been tripped, a red light will come on. Push the top button labeled "Reset" all the way in to restore electrical current.

Refrigerator

Household appliances are major consumers of energy. Maintain your refrigerator temperature at 37 to 40 F. Maintain your freezer temperature at 0 F.

The shelves on your Refrigerator are adjustable and removable. Wash the food compartments in warm soapy water or water and baking soda: Two tablespoons of baking soda per 1 quart of water. Never use Chloride or cleaner with bleach to clean stainless steel. Always unplug the electrical power cord from the outlet before cleaning.

Dishwasher

Using your dishwasher is typically more efficient than hand-washing your dishes. If you make sure to wash a full-load in your dishwasher it will take a lot less water than washing all of those dishes by hand. Dishwashers do use more energy though, so if you only need to wash a couple of dishes, hand-washing them in your kitchen sink will ultimately use less energy.

To Clean: Place a coffee cup filled with vinegar in the dishwashing rack and run a full cycle of dishwashing. This will clean your entire dishwasher. You can also use baking soda.

Walls

Make sure you use small nails to hang pictures and artwork to prevent damage to the walls in your home.