

# Use renovations to create healthier homes

Home renovation projects are done for several different reasons, whether to update styles, repair damaged or broken items or to achieve more living space. More than ever before, homeowners are choosing improvement projects geared toward making their homes healthier.

Establishing a healthy home means different things to different people. For example, to an environmentalist, a healthy home may incorporate eco-friendly or green products. To those with young children or mobility-impaired seniors, a healthy home may be one free from potential hazards. Others may view a healthy home as one that alleviates allergies.

The World Health Organization says inadequate housing conditions, such as poor ventilation, radon, urban pollution, and moisture issues, can contribute to many preventable diseases and injuries — especially respiratory problems, nervous system disorders, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer. Furthermore, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ranks indoor air quality as a top five environmental risk to public health. EPA studies have found that indoor air pollution levels were roughly two to five times greater than outdoor pollution levels.

People interested in making their homes healthier can embrace these renovations and lifestyle changes.

- Be aware of furniture materials. Toxic PBDEs, which are chemicals used as flame



retardants on furniture fabrics produced prior to 2006, can send toxins into the air. Some manufacturers may still use these flame retardants in new forms, but with similar risks. Before purchasing furniture, ask if a product is treated, and select naturally fire-resistant materials like wool and cotton.

- Lighten up. Lighting is often underappreciated but can have a dramatic impact on whether a home feels inviting, warm and/or uplifting. Experiment with different types of bulbs and lighting fixtures to turn drab and dreary environments into brighter places. Lighting may improve mood and productivity.

- Let the sun shine in. Modify window treatments to let more sunlight into the

house. There is evidence that the sun, particularly UV light, is a potent bactericide. The Sunlight Institute advises that there's no harm in letting natural sunlight do its work, as bacteria within eight feet of low-intensity UV light can be killed in 10 minutes.

- Inspect and service wood-burning appliances. A study published in the American Journal of Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology has found regular inhalation of wood smoke limits immune activity and function, and anyone who burns wood indoors should be aware of these potential health risks. Ensuring proper ventilation of smoke and routinely cleaning the chimney can help cut down on particulate matter.
- Turn to nontoxic clean-

ing products, pesticides and insecticides. Always opt for nontoxic, natural products when cleaning in and around the house.

- Declutter the home. A cluttered, hectic space can affect emotions and mental state, never mind attracting dust and making a home harder to clean. Spending time in

spaces that do not elicit stressful feelings is healthier and can help residents to rest and recharge.

Making a home healthier can be on the list of this year's renovation plans.



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## Prepare HVAC systems for warmer days ahead



Spring is an ideal time to have HVAC systems inspected and repaired, if necessary.

The arrival of a new season can be an exciting time. Homeowners may have renewed vigor to start home renovation projects or even tackle some cleaning and organization tasks. Before the weather starts to warm up too much, homeowners may want to evaluate their home cooling needs and ensure that all equipment is in good working order.

Spring air conditioning inspections and tuneups are essential steps in system performance. Homeowners should not take for granted that a system that performed optimally last year will do so this year when temperatures climb. Various factors, including weather damage, dust and grime, mechanical wear and tear, and even rodent or insect infestations, can compromise HVAC systems. Since HVAC systems have so many moving parts, a thorough inspection of such systems can save headaches and money down the road.

According to Heating On-

tario, the extreme weather conditions that come along with fall and winter can be especially taxing on homes and the systems that keep them comfortable. During a spring visit, an HVAC technician will perform maintenance on the air conditioner and make sure it is ready for the heat of summertime. This maintenance may include cleaning the unit, checking controls, calibrating the thermostat, lubricating moving parts, checking refrigerant levels, tightening electrical connections, and clearing any clogs. Homeowners are urged to also change the filter at the start of the cooling season.

Correcting any issues in the HVAC system well in advance of the arrival of warm weather can help ensure comfort when air conditioning is needed. As an added advantage, homeowners should install programmable thermostats if they do not already have them to keep cooling as cost- and energy-efficient as possible.



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