BETTERSAFE
WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

BREATHE EASY

How to Minimize Air Polutants

Even though you can't see it, the air you breathe can affect your health. Polluted air can cause difficulty breathing, flare-ups of allergy or asthma, and other lung problems. Long-term exposure to air pollution can raise the risk of other diseases, including heart disease and cancer.

Whether outdoors or indoors, the effects of air pollution are most obvious for those who already have difficulty breathing. All people are likely susceptible to the adverse effects of air pollution, but people who have chronic lung diseases such as asthma are more susceptible.

OUTDOOR POLLUTANTS

Several different types of pollutants can affect your health. When the weather is warm, an invisible gas called ozone can make it harder for some people to breathe. This gas is created when sunlight triggers a chemical reaction between oxygen and certain pollutants from cars, factories, and other sources.

Ozone can irritate the lining of your airways and lungs. People with asthma and other lung conditions are more likely to feel its effects.

Another type of outdoor pollutant that affects health is particulates. These are fine and coarse particles that are released when fuel is burned. They can come from things like cars, power plants, and wildfires. Research has linked particulates to short- and long-term lung problems.

To track these and other harmful pollutants, air quality monitors have been set up at over 1,000 locations across the country. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency uses these monitors to produce the Air Quality Index (AQI). The index can be found online at www.airnow.gov.

People who are sensitive to outdoor pollution may want to use the AQI to track when levels are high. This information can help you make choices about when to do outdoor activities.

INDOOR POLLUTANTS

Indoor air pollution can be harmful, too. It can come from many sources. Secondhand tobacco smoke contains tiny particles that can hurt your lungs. Gas stoves and appliances can create harmful gases.

Pets and pests (such as mice and cockroaches) can shed substances, called allergens, that cause allergies. Mold and dust mites also produce allergens. Even furniture and cleaning products can release harmful compounds into the air.

One good thing about indoor air pollution is that many causes can be removed or changed. Indeed, it's difficult to change the outdoor environment, but indoors is more contained.

A simple tool for many homes is making sure inside air has a chance to escape. Ventilating your house, such as opening windows, can actually lower the air pollution levels inside, and it really doesn't cost anything. This strategy may not work on days when outdoor pollution is very high, though. Paying attention to the AQI or other measures of outdoor air quality can help you decide when to let inside air out.

To reduce the effects of poor quality air on your health:

» **Avoid outdoor activities in the afternoons on warm days,** when the risk of air pollution is highest.

» **Avoid strenuous outdoor activities if the air is polluted.** Check your region's air quality index. Orange and red mean it's a bad air day, so people with lung problems should avoid the outdoors. Purple and maroon mean air pollution is extreme, and everyone should try to stay in an indoor environment with clean air.

» **Reduce pollutants in your home.** Don't let anyone smoke in your home. Avoid burning candles, incense, or wood fires. Run fans or open a window when cooking. Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter instead of sweeping to avoid stirring up dust and allergens