



National Center for Healthy Housing

What You Can Do at Home

To protect your family from household hazards, you will need to both solve any existing problems and keep new ones from becoming dangerous. The information on this page can aid in the process of maintaining a healthy home.

Checking for Hazards

Some checks to evaluate and document housing condition problems are traditionally performed by trained personnel on behalf of occupants or prospective tenants or buyers:

- Home inspectors assist buyers in identifying issues that warrant repair by the seller or further attention after purchase;
- Appraisers hired by lenders considering a mortgage loan assess the value of the home and factor conditions into the determining value; and
- Code inspectors respond to complaints, document problems in rental housing that violate housing and health codes, and issue citations that courts will enforce.

However, with the exception of evaluations prompted by health problems (such as a risk assessment ordered to identify lead hazards in response to a report of lead poisoning), most homes are never checked for health hazards. This is especially true for substandard housing in low-income communities that are at highest risk of health problems caused by environmental health hazards.

In recent years, tools for detecting significant health hazards in housing have become simpler, easier to use, and more affordable. A careful visual inspection can spot obvious signs of conditions that lead to health hazards. In some cases, it is necessary to collect environmental samples and send them to a lab for scientific analysis.

Basic training can prepare homeowners, community volunteers, and others to detect environmental hazards. While “expert” professionals can be hired to perform intensive testing, serious problems can be detected by individuals who have received entry-level training. For example, in many states, a certified lead sampling technician with eight hours of training can sample for and report on lead dust hazards.

Other housing condition evaluation systems can be expanded to screen for housing-related health hazards. For example, home inspections and housing code inspections should add health hazards to the scope of these investigations.

Hazard Mitigation

Depending on the hazard and its severity, you may need to hire an expert (such as a government certified specialist in lead, asbestos or radon) or participate in a voluntary program (like those for integrated pest management or radon). In other cases, a do-it-yourself solution can be both practical and relatively inexpensive. Some guidance on DIY lead-safe maintenance is provided in the Field Guide for Painting, Home Maintenance and Renovation Work.

Building a healthy home environment for All Children