

The NEBLINE

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension
Lancaster County

January 2000
Vol. XIII, No. 1

"Helping Nebraskans enhance their lives through research-based education."

Is your house healthy?

Lorene Bartos
Extension Educator

Happy 2000!! The Y2K SCARE is past. Even so, it is necessary to stay prepared for future disasters and emergencies. Now is the time to look at the new year and make plans for the environment of the home. A yearly maintenance check is very important and can save time and expense. What are your plans for the new century? Are you planning to remodel, build a new home or keep things the way they are?

Regardless of your plans, looking forward and making a check of the home can benefit your family in this new decade. Start by doing a self-inspection or walk-through of your home. Begin by touring your household. As you tour, look for biological pollutants, minor repairs that need to be made, appliances that need to be repaired or replaced, moisture or water damage and other things in your home may be a hindrance

to the health of the family. Since Americans spend up to 90% of their time indoors, often at home, breathing clean indoor air is necessary for good health.

Biological pollutants are or were living organisms. These pollutants travel through the air and are often invisible. Some common indoor biological pollutants are: animal dander (minute scales from hair, feathers or skin); dust mites and cockroach parts; fungi (molds); infectious agents (bacteria or viruses) or pollen. Even very clean homes may permit the growth of biological pollutants. Nutrients and moisture are essential for growth. The conditions can be found in many locations, such as bathrooms, damp or flooded basements, wet appliances (such as humidifiers and air conditioners) and even some carpets and furniture.

Molds are many times detected by a musty odor. Growths of mold can often be seen in the form of a discoloration, ranging from white to orange and green to brown and black. Mildew is a common mold. Mold requires moisture, thrives on organic materials and grows best in warm temperatures. To prevent mold from

growing, keep surfaces and household textiles clean and dry. The relative humidity in the home should range between 30 and 60 percent. Reduce humidity by using exhaust fans, venting clothes dryers to the outside and increasing the air flow in problem areas.

If replacing carpets are on the agenda for the new year, the Carpet and Rug Institute suggests the following guidelines: Choose a carpet certified to have low VOC emissions. VOCs are volatile organic compounds such as petroleum distillates, formaldehyde, mineral spirits, chlorinated solvents, trichloroethylene, etc. Arrange to roll out the carpet/pad/cushion to vent for 24 to 48 hours before installation. Plan installation of carpet in mild weather conditions to allow for doors and windows to be open. Increase ventilation for a few days after installation. When old carpets and pads are removed, carefully remove the dust that has collected as this is a good collection point for airborne contaminants.

If you have an older home, check for asbestos and the use of lead-base paint. Any surface painted prior to 1980 could

contain lead. Asbestos can be found in resilient floor tiles and sheet flooring, steam pipes, boilers and furnace ducts, roofing and siding shingles.

Plan to clean some of the areas that get slighted. Remember to check the air conditioner, humidifier, dehumidifier and refrigerator drip pan. Change the furnace filters and clean the vents in the bathrooms. Also check the dryer vent.

When you finish the tour of your home, make a list of things that need to be cleaned, replaced or repaired. Prepare a time line and make a budget to cover the cost that may be incurred. Start the new century on the right foot with a home that is safe and healthy for your family. (LB)

In this issue...

NEBLINE articles may be reprinted without special permission if the source is acknowledged as "University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County NEBLINE." If the article contains a byline, please include the author's name and title.



Horticulture
—page 2



Environmental Focus
—page 3



Farm Views
—page 4



Acreage Insights
—page 5



Food & Fitness
—page 6



Family Living
—page 7



4-H & Youth
—pages 8-9



Community Focus
—page 10

Lancaster County 4-H Council
University of Nebraska
Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County
444 Cherrycreek Road
Lincoln, Nebraska 68528-1507

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 537
Lincoln, Nebraska

*Wishing you the
Best in 2000!*

From the staff at the Lancaster Cooperative Extension Office

