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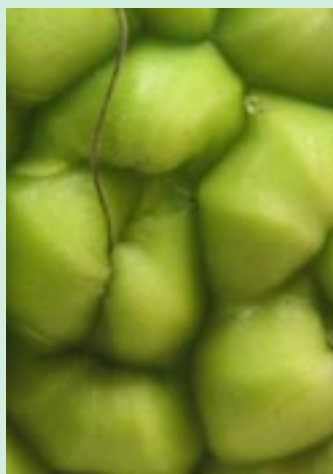
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NEW FEATURE!

Can You Guess It?
See back page.



Check Your Home for Biological Pollutants

Lorene Bartos
Extension Educator

Have you thought about the air you breathe lately? Most people are concerned about the air they breathe outside. Much effort and money is spent cleaning up pollution in the outdoor air. However, people spend 90 percent of their time indoors, often at home. Many times the indoor air contains more pollutants than the outside air. Biological pollutants promote poor indoor air quality and may cause health problems, days off from school or work, and trips to the doctor or even the hospital. These pollutants are or were living organisms. Common indoor biological pollutants are:

- animal dander (minute scales from hair, feathers or skin)
- dust mite and cockroach parts
- fungi (molds)
- infectious agents (bacteria or viruses)
- pollen

Even a spotless home may permit the growth of biological pollutants. Nutrients and moisture are two conditions essential for biological growth.

Modern materials and construction techniques may reduce the amount of outside air brought into buildings. This can result in higher moisture levels. Using humidifiers, unvented heaters and air conditioners in our homes has increased the chances of moisture forming on interior surfaces.

Since everyone is exposed to biological pollutants, the effects on our health depends on the pollutant and the individual person. Allergic reactions may be the most common health problem associated with poor indoor air quality in homes. These reactions can range from mildly uncomfortable to life-threatening, such as an asthma attack. Some common signs and symptoms are:

- watery eyes
- runny nose and sneezing
- nasal congestion
- itching
- coughing
- wheezing and difficulty breathing
- headaches
- fatigue.

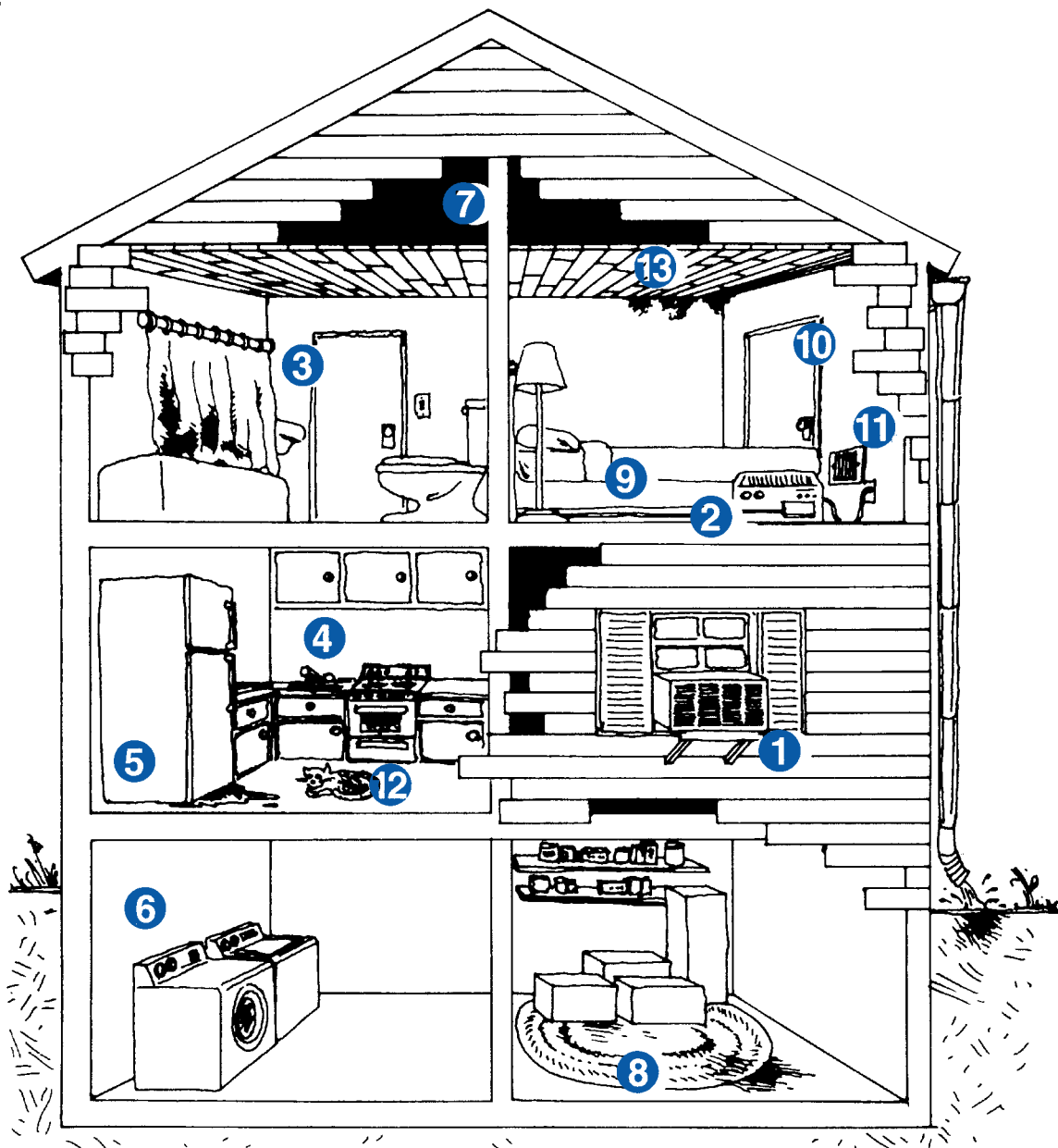
If you feel better outside than inside, you may have pollutants causing some of these problems.

Checking Your Home

Does your home have any of these problems? (See figure above). Take a tour of your home.

Dust and construction materials, such as wood, wallboard and insulation, contain nutrients that allow biological pollutants to grow.

Firewood is also a source of moisture, fungi and bugs. Appliances such as humidifiers, kerosene or gas heaters, and gas stoves add moisture to the air. A musty odor, moisture on hard surfaces and water stains may be caused by air conditioning units, basements, attics and crawl spaces, bathrooms, carpets, heating and air-conditioning ducts, humidifiers and dehumidifiers and



Where Biological Pollutants May Be Found in the Home

1. Dirty air conditioners
2. Dirty humidifiers and/or dehumidifiers
3. Bathroom without vents or windows
4. Kitchen without vents or windows
5. Dirty refrigerator drip pans
6. Laundry room with unvented dryer
7. Unventilated attic
8. Carpet on damp basement floor
9. Bedding
10. Closet on outside wall
11. Dirty heating/air conditioning system
12. Dogs or cats
13. Water damage (around windows, the roof or the basement)

refrigerator and freezer drip pans. Cleaning and proper maintenance of these items and places in the home can decrease the problems of pollutants.

Use dehumidifiers and air conditioners to reduce moisture in the air but be sure they do not become a source of pollutants. Follow manufacturers directions for cleaning humidifiers and dehumidifiers. Clean refrigerator drip pans regularly. Change furnace filters often. Use exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens to remove moisture to the outside.

Be sure crawl spaces are well ventilated. Fix any leaks or water seepage. Have all major appliances, such as furnaces, heat pumps and central air conditions inspected and cleaned regularly by a professional.

Controlling dust is very important for people who may be allergic to animal dander and mites. Always wash bedding in hot water to kill dust mites. Clean rooms and

closets well, dust and vacuum often to remove surface dust.

A healthy home results in healthy people.

Source: The American Lung Association and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.



OCTOBER IS HEALTHY INDOOR AIR AWARENESS MONTH.

Improve the environment you live in by taking steps to reduce the opportunity for biological pollutants to grow in your home.

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