



PRESS RELEASE

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CONVENTIONAL PAINT A HEALTH RISK

Consumers urged to choose non-toxic options

Occupants of new Australian homes may be exposed to 20 times the maximum allowable limits of indoor air toxics, according to the Greenpainters Association.

Studies conducted by the CSIRO show that the National Health & Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) maximum limits of total volatile organic air toxics may be exceeded in such houses for at least ten weeks after completion. The most potent sources were found to be paints, adhesives and some wood-based panels.

'It doesn't surprise us', says Daniel Wurm, president of the Greenpainters Association. 'Conventional paints can make the air you breathe a chemical cocktail even long after they have dried, as they continue to release petroleum based solvents, called Volatile Organic Compounds [VOCs] as they cure.'

It is estimated that each year in Australia more than 80,000 tonnes of VOCs are released into the atmosphere, with the paint industry contributing significantly to this amount.

Studies have shown that the cumulative VOC emissions from architectural painting operations exceed the combined emissions from a variety of industrial operations. VOCs from solvent and paint emissions contribute to harmful ozone formation and peroxyacetyl nitrate.

The Master Painters Association says that 'ozone irritates eyes, nose, throat and lungs; reduces breathing capacity even in healthy adults and children; increases susceptibility to infection, hospital visits and admissions; [and] causes damage estimated to cost over millions of dollars per year to crops and buildings'.

Typical oil-based paint averages 350g/L VOCs, or between 35-50% of the paint's volume. Even water-based acrylics, which are much less toxic, still contain 3-7% solvent content. The VOC content of paint and the CO₂ emitted during manufacture are key contributors to environmental impact - primarily in the form of air pollution (petrochemical smog) and to a lesser degree 'greenhouse gases'.

It is suspected that VOCs may also trigger respiratory reactions, and contribute to 'Sick Building Syndrome'. It has been estimated that in recently renovated buildings, approximately 70% of the indoor pollutants emanate from the paints used. Adverse health impacts such as Painter's Syndrome (brain and central nervous system damage), skin diseases, lung diseases and reproductive disorders have been linked to such modern paints.

"Just because a paint says it is Low-VOC does not mean it does not give off hazardous vapors", warns the Greenpainters Association. Other chemicals in conventional paints include glycols, toluene, hydrocarbons, xylene, and ammonia. Mineral turpentine (used as a thinner and solvent) may contain up to 20% benzene, which is a confirmed carcinogen and mutagen in chronically

exposed workers. Even water-based acrylic paints typically include a range of biocides to protect the latex, which can include arsenic disulphide, phenol, copper, formaldehyde, carbamates, permethrin and quaternary ammonium compounds. “While biocide manufacturer’s claim that the formaldehyde in these products won’t come out, EPA studies have shown that this is not the case”, says Mr. Wurm. In addition, many metal pigments used in paints (e.g. cadmium) are highly toxic and relatively rare resources.

“Having these chemicals coating our walls and in the air we breathe is surely not desirable.”

The Greenpainters Association recommends that consumers and specifiers check their web-site when choosing environmentally friendly paint. There are now a variety of alternatives to conventional coatings.

Plant-based paints are made using naturally occurring ingredients, including plant-derived solvents and binders, and therefore do not require high levels of processing. Many of the ingredients are made from renewable resources, such as linseed oil, and citrus oil. This results in better health outcomes, and uses renewable resources for sustainable living.

‘You can have any color as long as it's 'green!'’, said Mr Wurm. ‘There is now a network of painters across Australia who are keen to use these products, and know how to help consumers choose the healthy option.’

Greenpainters Association, in association with Master Painters, is a network of professional tradesmen established to provide advice, knowledge and skills to help consumers get the best environmentally-friendly, non-toxic coating for their painting and decorating project. Their web-site greenpainters.com.au provides objective summaries of sustainable paints and coatings, and information to help builders and renovators achieve the look they want while being eco-sensitive and health-conscious.

If you would like more information about this topic or you would like to arrange an interview, please contact Daniel Wurm on (03) 59130226, email admin@greenpainters.com.au or write to 167 Elizabeth Dve Rosbud VIC 3939