



# DON'T *Sweep it* UNDER THE CARPET

**HOW healthy is your home? It's an interesting question because most of us are so focused on practising good hygiene that we tend to neglect other potential health hazards in and around the home.**

Carpets, paint, cabinetry, decking, floorboards and even furniture all contain toxic compounds that are apparently not quite as innocuous as manufacturers would lead us to believe.

As a result, your home could be suffering from sick building syndrome, which doesn't augur well for those who reside within its toxic walls and are oblivious to an environment full of microscopic nasties.

Paradoxically though, it's the new or renovated homes, not the dusty old ones, that appear to be posing problems for inhabitants.

Avalon-based interior designers, Sharon Hamilton and Darryn Parkinson are so concerned

about the potential health risks associated with indoor air pollutants from introduced toxic compounds that they are now offering a specialised interior design service that provides advice on creating green interiors.

## YOUR HOME COULD BE SUFFERING FROM SICK BUILDING SYNDROME

However, as Ms Hamilton points out, finding suitable alternatives to conventional products isn't as simple as it sounds.

"We are constantly looking for suitable alternatives because the more research we do, the

more we are completely convinced it's the right way to be doing things," she said. "But this takes time because everything we recommend should be low in volatile organic compounds (VOCs) even the glues and adhesives."

The couple is so convinced that products with low VOCs are the only safe options for home interiors, that they believe the interior design industry as a whole should also adopt these seemingly safe practices.

"As industry professionals, we cannot be specifying products to our clients that could potentially lead to health problems. This industry needs to fundamentally change the way it's doing things – even down to the stuffing in soft furnishings or the flame retardants and stain-proofing on new upholstery."



Sharon Hamilton and  
Darryn Parkinson

## SO WHAT HARM CAN THESE CHEMICALS DO TO US?

Recent animal studies have shown that flame retardants (PBDEs) affect thyroid function and can impair the developing central nervous system and brain in utero, although human studies have been less conclusive.

"VOCs have been linked with a range of health issues from headaches, skin irritations and respiratory problems right through to asthma but it's very hard to find solid evidence that these conditions are caused by a particular chemical compound.

"Hundreds of these chemicals are in use in our daily lives but only a fraction of them have been tested on humans. My concern is that there's enough links and anecdotal evidence to make you question whether the rises in asthma, allergies and chemical sensitivities is due to VOCs."

While a number of paint and carpet brands are now manufacturing products with low VOCs, Ms Hamilton says it is a lot harder to find green alternatives to conventional furnishings.

She advises her clients to steer away from foam and instead go for pure products like wool, cotton, hemp or natural latex. She also recommends opting for water or plant based finishes on floorboards rather than the more common polyurethane finish and choosing a manufacturer that uses glues, adhesives and binders minus formaldehyde, a known carcinogenic.

"Most importantly, ensure you ventilate your house well." 🌿