

Steps you can take to reduce exposure to environmental hazards



Environmental hazards arise from biological, physical, and chemical factors, such as that experienced in the train derailment. Precautions must be taken when there is the potential of exposure to air pollution, contaminated soil and dust inside homes and buildings, as well as the potential impacts to drinking water. The simple steps listed below help to create a healthy home, school, childcare and work environment. These steps reduce risk of exposure and should be practiced year-round. If you are experiencing any health symptoms, keep a detailed log and keep records of receipts from any purchases related to these tips.

1 Frequent Cleaning

Creating a healthy indoor environment can be better managed by reducing exposure to dust. Wet dusting and wet mopping your indoor environment with a soap and water solution or mild detergent solution will keep exposure to dust particles low. If a microfiber cloth is used, wash before next use. Use of a vacuum that has a HEPA filter is also advisable. Unusually frequent damp wiping down of surfaces, and vacuuming would be prudent until the potential for contamination is better characterized.

Indoor Air Quality 2

If a resident smells unusual chemicals in their home or other building, the chemicals are present and alternative shelter should be considered. Using an air purifier is helpful to improve indoor air quality. An air purifier with a MERV filter rated 13 or higher will remove most airborne dust particles but not airborne vapors. An air purifier with both a MERV 13 filter and an activated charcoal filter will help reduce exposures to both contaminated dust and vapors. Home Depot and Lowes carry MERV 13 air filters for your HVAC system as well. For portable air cleaners, look for the highest CADR (clean air delivery rate) and AHAM certification.

3 Water Quality

Municipal water has to meet strict guidelines developed by the US Environmental Protection Agency. Certain situations may call for the temporary use of bottled water, such as the train derailment. Well water should be tested very 1-2 years for total coliform bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids, and pH levels. Since the train derailment, other contaminants could be present or appear in weeks or months as the chemicals slowly migrate through the soil. Well water tests now should also include analysis for volatile organic compounds (VOCs), including specifically those that were spilled after the derailment. If no VOCs are detected, tests should be repeated in 2-3 months throughout the year to be certain that this has not changed. Water filters that have an NSF certification are an acceptable option. Make certain the filter has activated carbon filtration, which will help remove many chemicals from water. Other filter options include reverse osmosis systems (visit <https://info.nsf.org/Certified/DWTU/>).

Other Household Tips 4

Other ways to reduce toxics in the home include: Leaving your shoes at the front door, so outside debris is not tracked inside; placing a mat at the front entrance to capture dust and debris before walking inside; and washing down all surfaces and items such as toys that children may be exposed to. Wipe pets' paws before entry or place booties on their paws.

For questions on creating a healthy indoor environment, contact Women For A Healthy Environment at 412-404-2872 or email info@WomenForAHealthyEnvironment.org.