



## Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

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### **Basic Information**

#### **Organic Gases (Volatile Organic Compounds - VOCs)**

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are emitted as gases from certain solids or liquids. VOCs include a variety of chemicals, some of which may have short- and long-term adverse health effects. Concentrations of many VOCs are consistently higher indoors (up to ten times higher) than outdoors. VOCs are emitted by a wide array of products numbering in the thousands. Examples include: paints and lacquers, paint strippers, cleaning supplies, pesticides, building materials and furnishings, office equipment such as copiers and printers, correction fluids and carbonless copy paper, graphics and craft materials including glues and adhesives, permanent markers, and photographic solutions.

Organic chemicals are widely used as ingredients in household products. Paints, varnishes, and wax all contain organic solvents, as do many cleaning, disinfecting, cosmetic, degreasing, and hobby products. Fuels are made up of organic chemicals. All of these products can release organic compounds while you are using them, and, to some degree, when they are stored.

EPA's Total Exposure Assessment Methodology (TEAM) studies found levels of about a dozen common organic pollutants to be 2 to 5 times higher inside homes than outside, regardless of whether the homes were located in rural or highly industrial areas. Additional TEAM studies indicate that while people are using products containing organic chemicals, they can expose themselves and others to very high pollutant levels, and elevated concentrations can persist in the air long after the activity is completed.

For more information, see EPA's [Substance Registry System](#) on VOCs.

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#### **Sources**

#### **Pollutants and Sources of Indoor Air Pollution**

- Asbestos
- Biological Pollutants
- Carbon Monoxide
- Formaldehyde/Pressed Wood Products
- Household Cleaning and Maintenance, Personal Care, or Hobbies
- Lead
- Nitrogen Dioxide
- Pesticides
- Radon
- Respirable Particles
- Secondhand Smoke/Environmental Tobacco Smoke
- Stoves, Heaters, Fireplaces, and Chimneys

Read "The Inside Story: A Guide to Indoor Air Quality"