

How to Maintain a

HEALTHY



HOME

Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
a Department of the Community Development Agency

Make Your Home a Healthy Place

Since most people spend almost 90% of their time indoors, a healthy indoor environment has an important impact on your health. However, to address all the aspects of a healthy home, you must consider the outdoor environment around your house and the building itself since they also play a role in your health and safety.



Keeping your house fit is more than an investment in your property, it is an investment in your family's health.

Prevent Water Leaks from Outside

A well-maintained roof is one of the most important parts of the house. Leaks, even small ones, that are not promptly repaired can soak the framing and walls of the house. This sets the stage for pests, mold and other conditions that slowly destroy the building as well as harming indoor air quality.

- Make sure windows and siding stay in good repair and are covered with intact paint.
- Check for leaks around gutters, pipes and chimneys.
- Keep gutters and downspouts clear and intact and make sure that rainwater drains away from the house at the foundation.



Prevent Plumbing Leaks

Most plumbing leaks occur at fixtures. Leakage can lead to costly repairs to walls, floors and framing. To prevent leaks, inspect and maintain seals at:

- toilets
- P-traps under sinks
- shower surrounds and pans

Fix leaks promptly to prevent water damage and mold growth. Know how to turn off your main water supply.



Pest Prevention

Don't provide a safe and comfortable place for pests to live!

- Fix roof and plumbing leaks.
- Clean up all standing water.
- Avoid clutter.
- Clear spills and crumbs from counters and floors.
- Use caulk to seal cracks and holes that can allow pests to enter your home.
- Make sure roof and crawl-space vents are covered with screens.



If you still have insect problems, avoid using insecticides or other poisons. Use materials that are less toxic to humans such as boric acid and diatomaceous earth to kill or drive away insect pests. For more information, call Alameda County Vector Control at 510-567-6800.

Control Indoor Moisture

Indoor moisture promotes the growth of mold in your home. Mold can cause allergic reactions, asthma episodes, infections and other respiratory problems. Adequate ventilation will prevent mold buildup indoors. Since cooking and bathing generate moisture, using exhaust fans over your stove and in bathrooms will send this moist air outside.

All exhaust fans and clothes dryers should be vented to the exterior of the building, not in an attic or crawl space.



Fire Prevention

- Place smoke detectors in hallways, bedrooms and living rooms. Change the batteries yearly; a good time to do this is when the change to Daylight Savings Time occurs.
- Don't allow clutter to accumulate.
- Throw away oily rags, do not store them.
- Keep flammable materials in a cool, well-ventilated space.
- Lit candles should never be left unattended.
- Buy a fire extinguisher and mount it on the wall of the kitchen. Read the directions and learn how to use it.
- Make a fire escape plan and practice it with your children so that everyone knows what to do.



- Inspect your fire extinguisher every year and recharge it as needed.

Imminent hazards: In case of fire, leave the building and call 911.

Gas Appliances

Fire and explosion hazards can result from faulty installation and lack of maintenance of stoves, water heaters, furnaces and other gas appliances. Regular maintenance can prevent unsafe situations from developing.



- Make sure gas appliances are properly vented. Defects can cause unsafe levels of carbon monoxide and other combustion gases.
- Water heaters should have a temperature and pressure relief valve.

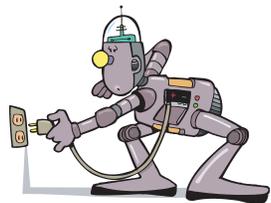
Imminent hazards: If you smell gas or suspect an immediate danger, leave the building and call PG&E for assistance. If possible, shut off the gas valve at the meter.

Electrical System

Overloaded circuits and faulty fixtures can overheat and cause fires. In addition, bare wires can be an electrocution hazard.

Outdated and overloaded systems and makeshift modifications are the most common causes of electrical hazards. Older houses usually need electrical system upgrades to provide enough electrical capacity and outlets for the large number of electrical devices now found in homes.

Outlets near water sources or outdoors should have Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) protection.



Imminent hazards: If you suspect an immediate danger, shut off the power and call a qualified electrician.

Lead-Based Paint

Many homes built before 1978 have lead-based paint, a serious health hazard.



- Repair all chipping and peeling paint and keep these surfaces in good condition.
- Use lead-safe work practices when doing work that disturbs paint.
- Keep children and pregnant women away from the work area where paint is being disturbed.
- If you or your family have been exposed to lead-based paint, contact your medical provider and request a blood lead test.

For more information, call the Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at 510-567-8280.

Toxic Materials

- Keep all materials that are toxic (cleaners, paints, solvents and medicines) out of the reach of children and in locked cabinets.
- When buying household products or building materials, look for non-toxic, unscented and “green” (environmentally friendly) products.
- Never mix cleaners together.
- Read the labels for using products safely; many cleaners require adding water to them.



- Use gloves, goggles and any other protective clothing suggested by the manufacturer.
- To dispose of household chemicals, contact the Alameda County Household Hazardous Waste disposal site at 800-606-6606.

Physical Safety Hazards

Keep your home in good repair and uncluttered to prevent safety hazards from developing. For example:

- Fix roof and plumbing leaks so that the structure is not subject to rot.
- Outdoor porches, stairs and decks should be inspected regularly to make sure that they are structurally sound.
- Keep clutter to a minimum to avoid tripping hazards in your home.



Imminent hazards: If a structural hazard is suspected, keep people away from it until repairs are made.

Seismic Hazards

- Be prepared with emergency supplies.
- Make sure the water heater is secured so it doesn't fall over during an earthquake.
- Don't store heavy objects high or where they could fall.
- Screw or bolt bookcases to walls so they won't tip over.
- Keep a gas shut-off wrench next to the gas meter for quick shut off in case of earthquake damage.
- If you can, secure your house to its foundation with anchor bolts and seismic bracing.



For more information call
The California Seismic Safety
Commission at 916-263-5506.

Outdoors:

A healthy environment focuses on both the outside and inside of the home.

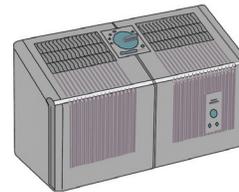
- Adequate drainage and proper grading prevent run-off from entering the house or basement.
- Keep the yard clear of debris and make sure trash is securely contained.
- Trees and foliage should have at least five feet clearance from the house and should never hang over the roof. Smaller shrubs should be kept at least three feet from the house.



Well-maintained landscaping prevents erosion and possible damage to the house. It also provides a safe place for kids to play.

Air Quality Devices: Buyer Beware!

Some air cleaners may be helpful in reducing airborne allergens, but there is no substitute for a well-maintained home. If water leaks or improper ventilation of appliances are producing indoor pollution, air cleaners will not solve the problem. In fact, some air "cleaners" actually generate ozone and increase harmful pollutants. If you decide to buy an air cleaner, make sure it is not an ozone generator.



Resources:

Agencies referred to in this booklet:

PG&E

phone: 800-743-5000

website: www.pge.com

Fire Department (emergency)

phone: 911

Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

phone: 510-567-8280

website: www.aclppp.org

Vector Control

phone: 510-567-6800

website: www.acvcsd.org

California Seismic Safety Commission

phone: 916-263-5506

website: www.seismic.ca.gov

Other Helpful Resources:

Poison Control Center

Hotline on accidental poisonings and information on possible poisons

phone: 800-222-1222

Governor's Office of Emergency Services

How to prepare yourself for an earthquake

phone: 510-286-0895

American Lung Association of the East Bay

Information on asthma and other respiratory illnesses

phone: 510-893-5474

website: www.lungusa.org



Alameda County Household Hazards Waste Facility

Disposal of household or hazardous waste, such as paint, solvents, batteries and insecticides

phone: 800-606-6606

website: www.acgov.org/aceh/hazard.htm

Minor Home Repair

Information on how to obtain small grants for home repairs (must meet income eligibility criteria)

phone: 510-670-5399

website: www.acgov.org/cda/hcd

EPA

More information on mold and air filters

phone: 866-EPAWEST

website: www.epa.com

Environmental Health Department

Information on a number of environmental health programs

phone: 510-567-6700

website: www.acgov.org

Alameda County Public Health Department Information Clearinghouse

Information on various county health agencies

phone: 888-604-INFO

website: www.acgov.org

EMBUD

Information on water shutoff and conservation

phone: 866-403-2683

website: www.ebmud.com

You can also search online for home improvement tips.

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