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The Green Girl's got a (paint) chip on her shoulder

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Take a deep breath. Or maybe not.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the air in our homes and offices can be two to five times more polluted than outdoor air. Indoor air quality is one of the top five hazards to human health.



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Some of the biggest culprits? Paints and other chemical finishes.

These products release low-level toxic emissions into the air for years after the paint brushes are dry. The toxins come from volatile organic compounds (VOCs) found in the paint and are one of the factors in indoor air quality issues such as "sick building syndrome."

Until recently, VOCs were essential in the performance of the paint. Now new environmental regulations and consumer demand have led to the development of low-VOC and zero-VOC paint. Some of these new paints may be a bit more expensive but pay us back in better health.

Low- or zero-VOC paints are critically important to infants and children, as well as to anyone with chemical sensitivities or allergies. Painted areas can be occupied sooner without complaints about odor, and since these products are water-based, clean up is with soap and water. The environment gets a boost from the reduction in contaminants in landfills and groundwater.

Your local paint store should have one or more low or no-VOC paints. Home Depot just released a zero-VOC paint called Fresh Aire. Not all stores are carrying it yet, so call to see if your store is one of them. Other manufacturers of low- or no-VOC paint include Bio-Shield, AFM SafeCoat, Yolo Colorhouse and Aura by Benjamin Moore. Other great alternatives are old-fashioned milk paints and American Clay wall finishes.

Regardless of what color you choose, always paint it green!

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