

Homes & Real estate

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Get a handle on dust for clean home environment

Children and elderly people are especially susceptible to dust-related breathing problems. So, consider taking a few simple steps to keep your dust bunnies from turning into dust buffalo.

By Tom Watson

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EcoConsumer

Not so long ago, attitudes about household dust depended mostly on appearances. If you didn't care whether the dust on the bookcase was so thick you could write your name in it, you wouldn't dust very often.

But dust has gotten personal. Dust and dust mites aggravate asthma and allergies, which have become much more common over the past 40 years. Children and elderly people are especially susceptible to dust-related breathing problems.

Whatever your reasons for dust control, consider taking a few simple steps to keep your dust bunnies from turning into dust buffalo.

Your level of dust vigilance at home should depend on whether any household members or regular visitors suffer from asthma, allergies or other dust sensitivities. If not, you may want to address other issues first, such as reducing your use of toxic cleaning chemicals.

If you do perceive indoor air quality as a significant health issue for those living in your home, go after other easy targets before you tackle dust. Make sure no one smokes indoors, and reduce or eliminate the use of chemical air fresheners.

Know your enemy

You don't need to become an expert on dust to reduce it at home, but you should at least know what you're dealing with.

Dust mites are one of the most common causes of allergies, according to Seattle Children's Hospital. "These microscopic insects live all around us and feed on the millions of dead skin cells



that fall off our bodies every day. Dust mites are the main allergic component of house dust, which is made up of many particles and can contain things such as fabric fibers and bacteria, as well as microscopic animal allergens.”

Eliminate problems

Dust mites typically live in bedding, upholstery and carpets, so target those first. Reduce carpeting and go with hardwood floors and washable area rugs when possible.

Removing shoes at the door is one of the easiest ways to cut down on dust. Pets and their hair add greatly to your home’s dust woes, so consider banning pets from certain rooms, such as your child’s bedroom.

For someone with allergies or asthma, use a zippered plastic allergy cover for their mattress, placing duct tape over the zipper to seal it tightly. Search online for “breathable mattress encasings,” or ask local mattress retailers.

Wash bedding in hot water every week or two.

Regularly dust and vacuum window blinds and curtains, both dust magnets.

The dirty, dusty little secret in your child’s room is all those cute stuffed animals on the bookcase. Pick just one or two favorite stuffed critters to leave out, and wash those regularly.

Dust busters

Tools to fight dust have improved recently. They include:

- Vacuum cleaners. Consult online reviews and choose a vacuum rated highly for handling dust and other specific needs, such as pet hair pickup. Consumer Reports says bagged upright vacuums tend to be best for carpets and that Kirby and Dirt Devil are the most reliable brands among uprights. A vacuum with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter may not always be necessary or worth the higher cost.
- Furnace filters. Consumer Reports gives top marks for dust removal to 3M Filtrete filters with an MPR, or “microparticle performance rating,” of 1,000 or higher. Change furnace filters every two months.
- Air purifiers. These can be noisy, and you may not need one if you have a good furnace filter. Don’t choose an air purifier that produces ozone.
- Microfiber or electrostatic dusting cloths. Disposable brands such as Swiffer are effective, but reusable and washable microfiber dusting cloths also work well and cost less in the long run. Find the best deals on reusable microfiber cloths in auto care sections of big-box stores.

To rephrase a famous line from Neil Young, “Dust never sleeps.” But you’ll sleep better if you get a handle on it.

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