

ASK THE BUILDER

I'm getting ready to paint my house. In the past I would buy any old paint. But now with my children, I am concerned about the odor and what paint does to the environment. What's available these days that is friendlier to the earth?

It's great that you have concerns for your children and their future by wanting to use a more "organic" paint product. Not long ago people were driven from their house during repainting. Paints contained high levels of VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) that produced an unhealthy breathable gas when applied. Paint is one of the biggest contributors to indoor air pollution due to the VOC with short- and long-term health effects. Today there are several different types of paints available that have low or no VOC in the paint. Let me give you a little back ground about VOC in paint and some alternative paint products.

Environmental regulations and consumer demand have led to the development of newer paints. Volatile Organic Compounds are emitted as gasses from solids or liquids. The EPA developed a standard for acceptable VOC levels. A can of paint can have around 250 grams per liter. But consumers demanded better and now paints are available with 50 grams per liter or less. But you need to ask questions and read the labels to make sure you are getting a low or no VOC paint.

A non-profit organization called Green Seal provides science-based environmental certification standards that are credible. You can look for their seal on paint products. They are much stricter than the EPA and certify a more safer and sustainable product.

Low- or zero-VOC paints can increase the VOC levels by adding colorants to the base paint. For most paints the darker the tint, the higher the VOC of the final blend. Make sure you ask about the VOC content from the tint. It is important to keep the VOC level to a minimum.

There is also an alternative Non-Toxic or Natural Paint. These paints are mostly manufactured by alternative paint companies. These paints will be harder to find and you may have to order them on line. They are made from natural ingredients and although they are environmentally friendly and healthy, you may experience some performance difference in the way the paint covers (or doesn't) and flows off the brush. Just be aware that these paints don't all act like the mass produced paints to which we've become accustomed

The Non toxic or natural paints are much safer and use raw ingredients that are natural and include plant oils like citrus, plant dyes, natural minerals such as clay, milk protein and bees wax to name a few.

When you are finished with your paint, it's important to dispose of the paint properly. If you do choose to use any oil based paints, they are considered a hazardous material and must be disposed of properly. There are several places to dispose of your hazardous paint

around town. The city of Santa Barbara, Marborg, BFI and UCSB all have information and disposal locations around the area. You can check them out on their web sites or call them for further information.