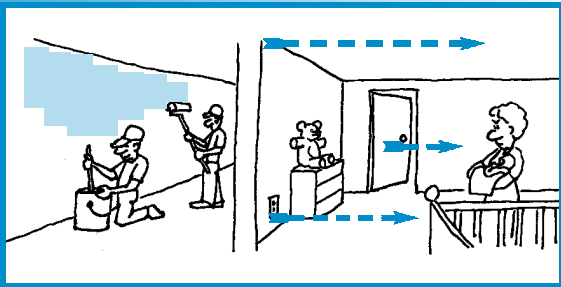


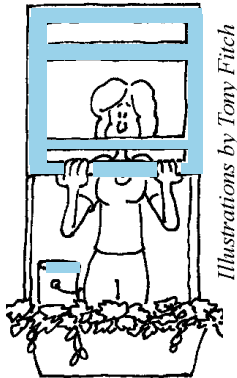
## What Are the Special Issues for Apartment Dwellers?

Vapors from paints are a special issue in apartment buildings because the vapor moves as “shared air” between units. Painters should be aware that harmful gases can move through common walls through gaps around pipes and electrical outlets. Apartment managers should consider giving advance notice to neighbors that a unit is to be painted. They should consider inspecting



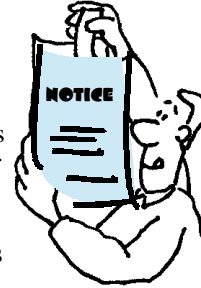
painted units to ensure that ventilation is maintained during painting and, as a rule of thumb, for at least 2 to 3 days afterwards, and they should consider loaning box fans to residents who are painting their apartments.

Problems may be reduced if all apartments being painted, as well as neighboring apartments, are vented to the outdoors with box fans.



## Healthy Painting Guidelines

- ✓ Try to schedule painting for dry periods in the fall or spring, when windows are more easily left open for ventilation.
- ✓ Keep windows wide-open, as weather permits, for about 2 to 3 days after painting to avoid unwanted exposure to paint vapors (and to return to acceptable indoor air quality).
- ✓ Use window-mounted box fans to exhaust vapors from the work area. Make sure they cannot fall out of the window. If fans cannot be used, make sure that rooms being painted have adequate cross-ventilation.
- ✓ Provide advance notice to neighbors in adjacent units that painting is to begin.
- ✓ Take frequent fresh air breaks while painting. Avoid freshly painted rooms for 2 to 3 days, whenever possible. Keep young children and individuals with breathing problems from freshly painted rooms. Leave painted areas if you experience eye watering, headaches, dizziness, or breathing problems.



## How Can I Get More Information?

To obtain further help in ensuring a safe, healthy indoor air environment, contact:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse;  
1 (800) 438-4318 or on-line at  
<http://www.epa.gov/iaqxline.html>

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20207  
English/Spanish: 1 (800) 638-2772  
Hearing/speech impaired: 1 (800) 638-8270

Consumers can get recall and other safety information on-line at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) or report product hazards to [info@cpsc.gov](mailto:info@cpsc.gov).

United States  
Environmental  
Protection Agency

Office of Pollution  
Prevention and  
Toxics (7406)

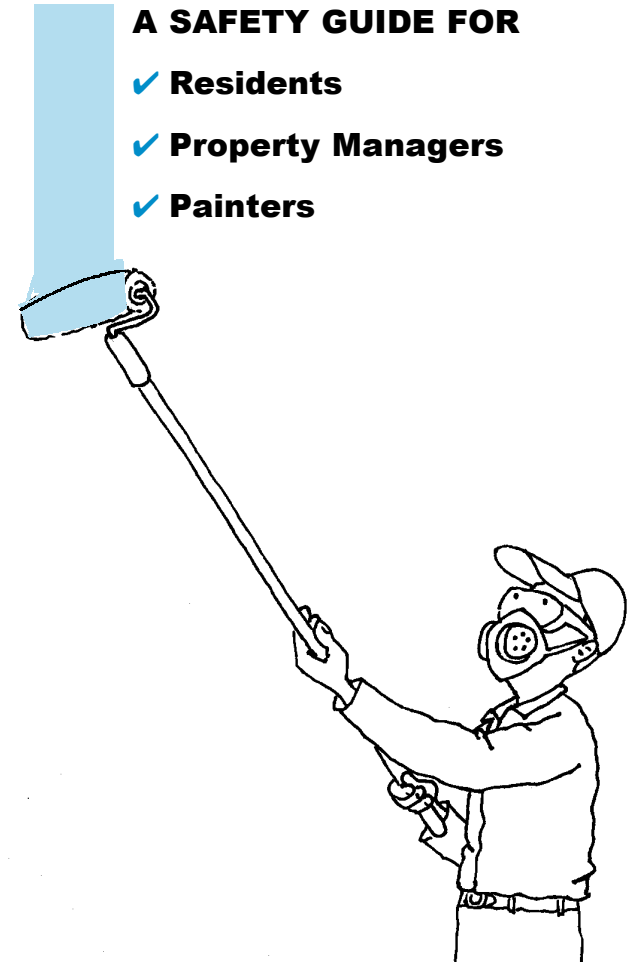
EPA 744-F-00-011  
May 2000



## Healthy Indoor Painting Practices

### A SAFETY GUIDE FOR

- ✓ Residents
- ✓ Property Managers
- ✓ Painters



People's susceptibility to paint chemicals varies widely. Additionally, the types and amounts of chemical emitted from paint vary widely, especially between oil-based and latex paints. Therefore, residents, property managers, and painters are strongly urged to follow several simple steps to reduce possible adverse reactions. These steps include **reading the label** to select products that do not emit harmful vapors, and providing ventilation. Usually it is necessary to keep windows wide-open and to use exhaust fans. Fans should be used while painting, and, for some paints, for 2 to 3 days afterwards. These simple steps can help reduce potential problems for residents, neighbors and painters.

### What Are the Health Concerns?

Most paints contain chemicals that evaporate in the air. The ability of these chemicals to cause health effects varies greatly. As with any chemical, the likelihood of a reaction and the extent and type of health effect will depend on many factors. These factors include the amount of chemical in the indoor air, the length of time a person is exposed to the chemical, and a person's age, pre-existing medical conditions, and individual susceptibility. Eye and throat or lung irritation, headaches, dizziness, and vision problems are among the immediate symptoms that some people have experienced soon after exposure to some chemicals. In professional painters who are exposed to high levels of paint vapors for long periods of time, some chemicals in paints have damaged the nervous system, liver and kidneys. Some chemicals cause cancer or reproductive and developmental effects in laboratory animals. Because of these concerns, susceptible people, such as young children and individuals with breathing problems, should avoid paint vapors. To avoid any health risks for themselves and their unborn babies, pregnant women should avoid undertaking painting projects and should limit their time in freshly painted rooms, especially when oil-based paints are being used.

### How Do I Select Paint?

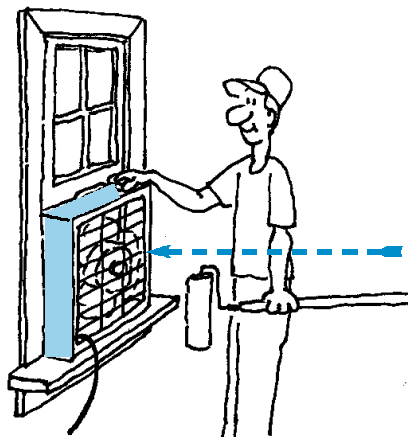
First, make sure you select paints that are for indoor use. Do not use exterior paints indoors. There are two categories of interior paints, water-based and oil-based. Water-based paints are referred to as "latex" paints. The oil-based paints are referred to as "alkyd" paints. In general, water-based paints will emit fewer chemicals and lower levels of chemical vapors. Short-term exposure to solvents from alkyd paints can be significantly higher than from latex paints. When selecting paint or contracting for painting services, read the label for information about the potential health effects of the paints or ask the contractor or paint supplier.

### Are There Specific Safety Precautions?

Paints contain different chemicals and the potential hazards are different for various products. Each product has specific safety precautions given on the label. However, there are some basic safety steps to keep in mind when using any paint.

**Always read and follow all the instructions and safety precautions on the label.** Do not assume you already know how to use the product. The hazards may be different from one product to another. Some ingredients in individual products may also change over time. The label tells you what actions you should take to reduce hazards and the first aid measures to use if there is a problem.

**There must be plenty of fresh air where you paint.** Open all doors and windows to the outside (not to hallways). Curtains and blinds should be pushed back so that there is nothing blocking the airflow,



to ensure cross-ventilation. Place a box fan securely in the window blowing out to ensure air movement. Do not point the fan directly at someone else's space. Secure the fan within the window frame so that it cannot fall out of the window or be tipped over by children. If it rains or snows, turn the fan off and remove it from the window to avoid an electrical shock hazard. An air conditioning unit should not be substituted for the use of a fan. In addition, bathroom/kitchen exhaust fans do not always vent out-of-doors and should not be relied upon to increase ventilation.

### Continue to provide fresh air after painting.

Part of the risk with indoor painting arises from the idea that dry paints are safe. While some paints may have only a small quantity of volatile materials that evaporate quickly, other paints may have a significant amount of organic solvents or drying oils that take several days to go away. Given this fact, a general "rule of thumb" for avoiding unwanted exposure to paint vapors (and to return the air to acceptable quality), ventilation should be continued for 2 or 3 days.

### Follow paint can directions for the safe cleaning of brushes and other equipment.

Latex paint usually cleans up with soap and water. For alkyd paints, you will need to purchase specific products as listed on the label. **Never use gasoline to clean paint brushes.** Gasoline is extremely flammable. Read the label to find out if the paint cleaner is flammable. All flammable products should be used away from ignition sources such as water heaters, furnaces, electric motors, fans, etc.

**Buy only what you need, and store or throw away the unused amount.** Since paints are used only occasionally, buy only as much as you will use right away. If you have leftover paint, be sure to close the container tightly. Vapors can leak from improperly sealed containers. Follow the directions on the can on how to dispose of the product. Latex paint and its containers can often be thrown out with regular household trash. In some communities, there are special recycling programs for paints. To find out about these, you should contact your local government.