



National Strategy To Produce Healthy Homes

The U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Deputy Secretary Ron Sims and Acting Surgeon General Steven K. Galson issued a national “Call to Action” on June 5, 2009 to confront the prevalence of home-related preventable diseases such as lead poisoning and asthma by unveiling [HUD’s Healthy Homes Strategic Plan](#) and the [Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Healthy Homes](#) as a coordinated effort with other public and private partners to stimulate a national dialogue about creating healthier homes.

HUD’s Strategic Plan stresses comprehensive healthy homes principles including the need to keep homes dry, clean, well-ventilated, pest- and contaminant-free, safe, and well-maintained. HUD’s strategy envisions a future where homes are affordable while supporting the health and safety of occupants. HUD’s Strategic Plan focuses on four key goals:

- 1) Building a National Framework: Foster partnerships for implementing a healthy homes agenda.
- 2) Creating Healthy Housing through Key Research: Support strategic, focused research on links between housing and health and cost-effective methods to address hazards.
- 3) Mainstreaming the Healthy Homes Approach: Promote the incorporation of healthy homes principles into ongoing practices and programs.
- 4) Enabling Communities to Create and Sustain Healthy Homes: Build sustainable local healthy homes programs.

The Call to Action outlines the next steps of a society-wide approach to healthy homes that will result in the greatest possible public health impact and reduction of disparities in the availability of healthy, safe, affordable, accessible, and environmentally friendly homes. The Call to Action also offers a list of things every family can do to make their home healthier and safer including:

- Check gas appliances, fireplaces,

chimneys, and furnaces yearly and change furnace and air conditioning filters regularly.

- Keep children safe from drowning, lead poisoning, suffocation and strangulation, and other hazards.
- Improve air quality in their homes by installing radon and carbon monoxide detectors, eliminating smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke, and controlling allergens that contribute to asthma and mold growth.
- Improve water quality by learning to protect and maintain private water wells.

The announcement of The Healthy Homes Strategic Plan and Call to Action are part of the national Healthy Homes Initiative led by HUD and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with support from such organizations as the National Center for Healthy Housing, the Alliance for Healthy Homes, and the Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning.

To read more about HUD’S Healthy Homes Strategic Plan, [visit HUD’s website](#). For additional information

UPCOMING EVENTS

Solar 2009 Green Homes and Sustainable Communities 2009

▶ Aug 6-7, 2009 | Boston, MA
 ☞ www.tinyurl.com/ghsc09

Healthy Buildings 2009

▶ Sept 13-17, 2009 | Syracuse, NY
 ☞ www.hb2009.org/home

National Council of State Housing Agencies Annual Conference

▶ Oct 3-6, 2009 | San Antonio, TX
 ☞ www.ncsha.org/conference.cfm/2882

Energy and Environmental Building Alliance Conference and Expo

▶ Sept 28-30, 2009 | Denver, CO
 ☞ www.eeba.org/conference/index.html

about the Call to Action, visit www.surgeongeneral.gov and www.cdc.gov/healthyhomes.

Using Mulch to Conserve Water

One of the best methods of growing healthy plants and conserving water is to use mulch in the landscape. Mulch is a protective ground covering that saves water, reduces evaporation, prevents erosion, controls weeds, and in the case of organic mulches, enriches the soil. Mulches can be classified as organic or inorganic.

Mulching reduces soil moisture loss through evaporation. Mulch also reduces the soil’s exposure to wind which also reduces water loss through evaporation. The insulating quality of mulch helps to keep the soil cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. By maintaining more even soil moisture and temperature, mulch promotes better root growth and plant health. Mulch also helps to reduce rain splash and runoff, which can help to prevent erosion in steep areas.

Mulch also suppresses the growth of many weeds. A 3- to 4-inch layer of organic mulch should be sufficient to prevent sunlight from reaching the soil, thereby reducing the chance of weed growth. Any weed seedlings that do manage to germinate and break through the layer of mulch are easily pulled. A mix of coarse and fine mulch will help reduce seed germination.

Since some mulch decomposes over time, it will need to be replenished or replaced periodically. There is no need to remove the old and replace with new mulch, since soil organisms will work the decomposing organic matter into the soil, increasing the health of the soil.

Fix Water Leaks to Reduce Waste

Leaks in toilets, faucets, showerheads, irrigation systems and garden hoses can waste thousands of gallons of water per year.

The toilet is the number one water user in the home. Toilets often have silent leaks that can waste hundreds of gallons a year. A constantly running toilet can waste more than 200 gallons of water every day. A common reason why toilets will leak is an old or worn out toilet flapper or valve seal. Flappers are inexpensive rubber parts that can build up minerals or decay over time. Replacing them can be a quick and easy fix which saves a lot of water.

Faucets and showerheads are also fixtures that can leak and waste water. Old and worn faucet washers and gaskets frequently cause leaks in faucets. A leaky faucet or showerhead that drips at the rate of one drip per second can waste more than 3,000 gallons per year. Most leaky showerheads can be fixed by tightening

the connection between the showerhead and the pipe stem and by using pipe tape to secure it. Pipe tape, also called Teflon tape, is available at most hardware stores, is easy to apply, and can help tame unruly leaks. A showerhead leaking 10 drips per minute wastes enough water in a year to run the dishwasher 60 times.



In-ground irrigation systems should be checked each spring to make sure the system wasn't damaged by frost or freezing. Irrigation professionals that are hired should have passed a certification program focused on water efficiency. These certified professionals will not only help you detect and correct leaks in the system, but also maximize its efficiency.

Finally, check all garden hoses for leaks at the connection to the spigot. If it leaks while you run your hose, replace the nylon or rubber hose washer and ensure a tight connection to the spigot using pipe tape and a wrench. An irrigation system at 60 psi with a leak the thickness of a dime can waste about 6,300 gallons of water per month.

If you replace any fixtures look for the WaterSense label to increase water efficiency. For further information on WaterSense or to see a complete list of WaterSense labeled products [click here](#). Retrofitting the house with WaterSense labeled fixtures could save a family of four approximately \$2,000 in water bills over the lifespan of the products.



TIPS FOR RESIDENTS - LOWER YOUR ENERGY BILLS THIS SUMMER

- Install white window shades, drapes, or blinds to reflect heat away from the house.
- Close curtains on south- and west-facing windows during the day.
- Whenever possible, open shaded windows and use fans instead of operating your air conditioner.
- If you use a window air conditioner, use a fan with it to spread the cool air throughout your home.
- Don't place lamps or TVs near the thermostat. The heat from these appliances will trick the air conditioner into running longer.
- Caulking and weatherstripping around doors and windows can save up to 30% on cooling costs.
- Programming your thermostat to give your air conditioner a break for the eight hours you're at work — even by just a degree or two — could cut your cooling bill by up to 10%.
- Lower the thermostat on your hot water heater: 120 degrees is comfortable for most uses.

We want to hear from you! Please send us nominations for projects to be highlighted in the EcoWise success stories.



Contact us at ecowise@deval.us