

VOLATILE ORGANIC COMPOUNDS

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) form a large group of chemicals commonly found in both indoor and outdoor air. They can affect air quality. While some VOCs give off distinctive odours at higher levels, they may be present even if you can't smell them. Exposure to VOCs in indoor air may affect your health, depending on which VOCs are present, the level of VOCs present, and how long you are exposed.

HEALTH EFFECTS OF VOCs

For most VOCs, levels found in indoor air in Canadian homes do not usually pose a significant health risk.

Exposure to some VOCs can cause:



fatigue



nausea



dizziness



headaches



breathing problems



irritation of the eyes, nose and throat

WHO IS AT GREATEST RISK

- Children
- Seniors
- Pregnant people
- People with existing health conditions, such as asthma, chronic pulmonary disease or bronchitis



INDOOR SOURCES

VOCs can get into indoor air from many sources, including:

Cigarette smoke

Building materials, such as paint, glues and varnish

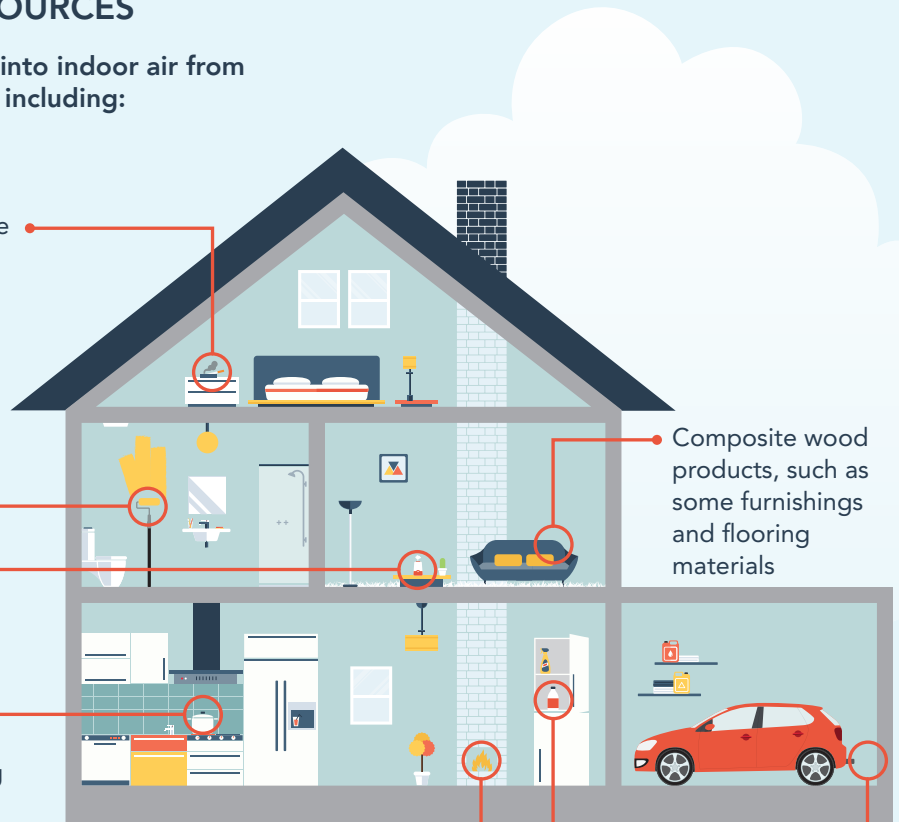
Candles and incense

Cooking, especially frying

Combustion sources such as improperly vented fireplaces, wood stoves, gas stoves and furnaces

Household products, such as air fresheners and cleaning products

Infiltration from attached garages, such as from vehicle exhaust

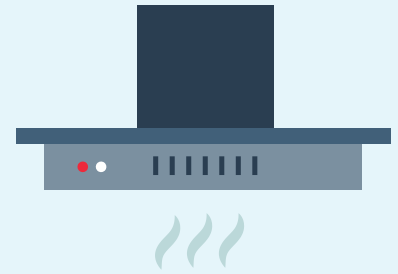


REDUCING EXPOSURE TO VOCs IN YOUR HOME

You can reduce exposure to VOCs in your home by:

INCREASING VENTILATION

- when possible use a range hood exhaust fan with outside venting when cooking
- ensure proper ventilation to the outside during use of combustion appliances such as fireplaces, wood stoves, gas stoves and furnaces
- open windows when outdoor air conditions are good
 - check the outdoor air quality in your community by visiting the [Air Quality Health Index \(AQHI\)](#)



AVOIDING SMOKING INDOORS

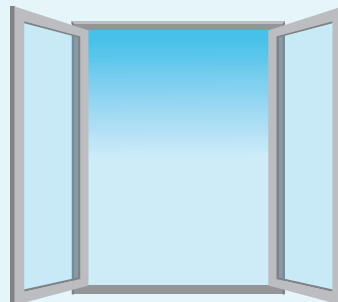
- **second-hand smoke** contains many different VOCs

Ensuring there is a **GOOD SEAL** around any doors connecting the house to an attached garage



OPENING THE WINDOWS WHEN USING CLEANING PRODUCTS, especially those with strong chemicals

- read and follow label instructions of all cleaning products



OPENING THE WINDOWS WHEN USING PRODUCTS, such as:

- glues
- paints
- varnishes
- adhesives



CHOOSING LOW-EMISSION PRODUCTS when possible

- some composite wood products, paints, varnishes and chemical cleaning products may emit fewer VOCs than others
- store products **properly**



MINIMIZING THE USE OF SCENTED PRODUCTS, such as plug-in or aerosol deodorizers (air fresheners)

- these products can hide odours by producing VOCs



For more information on VOCs, please visit the [Health Canada website](#) or contact us at air@hc-sc.gc.ca