



CUSTOMERS

by Terri Pilcher

"I moved into an apartment that had just been painted, and it [nauseated me] to be in there," said Rachel Bleckman. "It took a lot of months for my headaches and dizziness to go away." She researched and found information on non-toxic paint. When her landlord wanted to repaint the walls, Rachel explained her problems with paint and the solution she'd found. "I told my landlord about it, and she was totally willing to do it."

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BREATHE

easy

Breathe Easy— Continued from page 56

Millions Hypersensitive to Paint

Many homeowners experience problems breathing in freshly painted rooms. A 2004 article in the *Archives of Environmental Health* stated that 11.2 percent of Americans, that's 32.5 million people, experience hypersensitivity to chemical products such as fresh paint and perfumes.

Companies Offering No-VOC and Odor-Free paints

AFM SafeCoat

www.afmsafecoat.com

Benjamin Moore & Co.

www.benjaminmoore.com

BioShield Paints

www.bioshieldpaint.com

Devoe Paint

www.devoe.com

Duron Paints & Wallcoverings

www.duron.com

Kelly Moore

www.kellymoore.com

Old Fashioned
Milk Paint Company

www.milkpaint.com

According to Ron Joseph of Ron Joseph & Associates, an independent consulting firm for the painting industry and expert paint witness, a few homeowners have died or been seriously injured from paint fumes, but "it's extremely rare," he said. "I know of 2 cases." The out-gassing of the paint, or release of solvent from the drying paint, causes the problems to hypersensitive individuals.

According to AFM SafeCoat, a manufacturer specializing in no-VOC products, "The distinctive smell of paint is dibutyl and diethyl phthalate and other chemical compounds that cause nausea,

dizziness, and severe headaches." As paint dries, these chemical compounds change to a gaseous form and enter the atmosphere.

Michelle Miller was struck down by her hypersensitivity to paint fumes, ending up in the hospital while renovating her home. Although she talks very little about what happened to her because she's currently in litigation, she did say that her susceptibility to fumes surprised her. "I was training for a triathlon, so I was pretty strong and healthy," she said. "I had believed that they wouldn't put products on the market unless they were tested and safe."

In response to her unexpected hypersensitivity, Miller began experimenting with non-VOC products in her rental properties and ended up creating protocols for renovations friendly to hypersensitive individuals, which she calls the Safer-Building How-To Guide.

Many people exposed to drying paint are affected by out-gassing, even when they don't realize it. "A

painter who used our protocols told me that he and his crew felt better using our recommended products than they'd ever felt after a day of work," said Miller. Many neurotoxins, chemicals that affect the nervous system, create a run-down feeling as the day wears on. Painters, who work hard for a living, may feel more run-down than other laborers because of their exposure to paint fumes.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, there are no VOC standards for paints used in non-industrial applications. In addition, Joseph, who has given courses on paintings and coatings

in most EPA regions, explained that VOC standards vary between states, so paints in California may differ from those in Kansas. Paints labeled "low-VOC" don't necessarily contain a truly low VOC level. The paint may merely off-gas less than other products or be a modified version of another formula.

Green Seal, an independent non-profit organization, provides low-VOC standards for paints. Green Seal regulations vary depending on the type of paint. Interior flat paints contain no more than 50 g/l of VOC; interior non-flat paints may have up to 150 g/l; exterior flat paints can contain up to 100 g/l; exterior non-flat paints may have up to 250 g/l. Well known brands such as Benjamin Moore, Olympic, and Dutch Boy carry products with this certification. Other companies, like Sherwin Williams, create their own designations for low-VOC paints.

Even these VOC standards may not be enough for some homeowners. With the many no-VOC paints now on the market, there's no reason not to use odor-free paints for chemically sensitive homeowners.

Improving Air Quality

For clients with little or no known sensitivity to low-VOC paints, increased ventilation is an adequate precaution. Chris Dankowski of Dankowski Painting specializes in interior residential repaints. He said, "A lot of the time, the house is occupied while we are working. This makes controlling the air quality a top priority. Fortunately, most interior acrylics are low-VOC and unobtrusive to begin with. We are also always sure to keep the house well ventilated, and we always bring a fan to the job site. We rarely get complaints about the air quality on a job site."

During the coldest days of winter and in cooler parts of the country, opening windows to increase ventilation may not be an option. Clients have asked Bill Pilcher Painting in Maryland to move interior paint jobs to March when the weather is warmer, because, they say, "We don't want to have the windows open in January."

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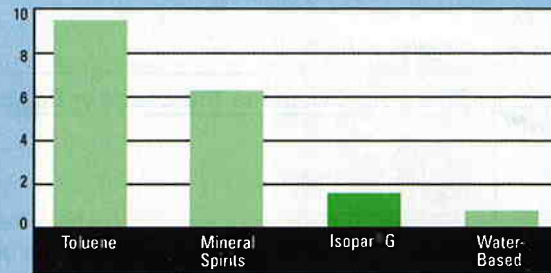
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The Air Change Index (ACI)



Air Change Index (ACI): the number of air changes per hour needed to be within the Occupational Exposure Limit (OEL). Lower than one means the volume of air in the room is enough to keep the solvent vapors below the OEL and does not need to be renewed. Above 1, the ACI value indicates the number of air renewals required to work safely with the paint without exceeding the acceptable limit. It's always good practice to ventilate.

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Breathe Easy—

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With new paints, cold winter weather is no longer a reason to avoid interior painting. Clients who prefer closed windows during cold weather can be offered no-VOC paints. Using no-VOC paints may enable painters to increase their winter work schedule.

For truly hypersensitive or environmentally conscious homeowners, no-VOC paints are the best

popular. "I think there are so many people who get headaches when they paint," she explains. "They can smell new paint for months after the house is painted, and I suspect that's why that's one of our more popular [guides]."

Incorporating no-VOC Into Your Business

Mel Yoho, owner of Yoho Construction, uses no-VOC paints with only a small number of regular clients. "No-VOC paints won't

tomorrow who mentions hating the smell of paint fumes, Yoho recommended offering two prices on your estimate, one with the paint you usually use and one with no-VOC paint. Painting is a competitive industry, and you don't want to lose a customer just because they don't want to spend a little extra for a no-VOC paint.

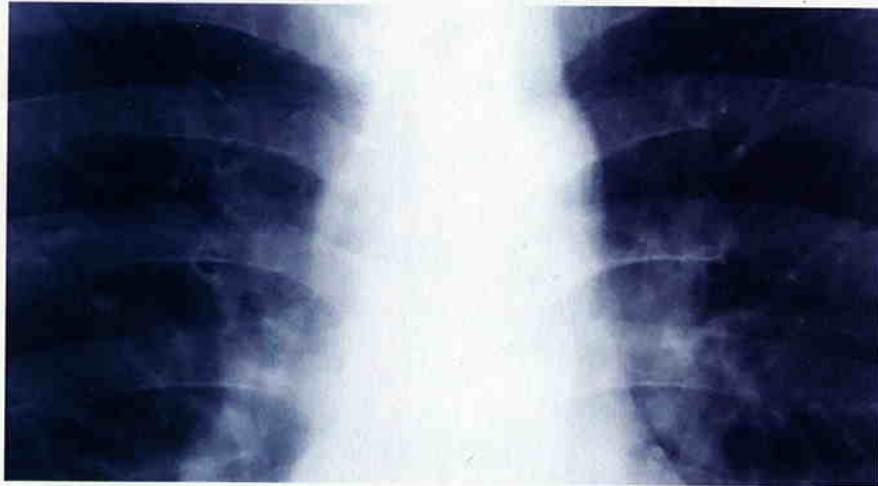
If you're considering a push for new clients, it might be worth your time to put up a flyer in a health food store that mentions your willingness to use no-VOC paints. "People who go to health food stores are interested in health issues more than anything," said Yoho. "Advertising in a newspaper won't recapture your costs," he added. It's easiest to locate clients who are already informed and health conscious.

Miller now specializes in renting units renovated to her no-VOC standards. "For us, it's fabulous," she said. "We have an open house and people say, 'Wow! I feel so good in here.'" Her properties have waiting lists in areas where there are plenty of vacancies. Miller admitted she would never have considered using no-VOC paints prior to her collapse. "I wouldn't have thought about it either if it hadn't happened to me," she said.

For Dustin Wilson, however, no-VOC paints are just one more confusing option that clients must consider. Wilson, of Flying Colors Painting, said clients "have a million colors to choose from and four or five sheens, so they don't want to have to make another choice that they aren't expecting. Of course, some people are chemically sensitive and require it, as do any occupied commercial spaces. I'm glad it's available, but it's just one product that helps when I need it."

Offering no-VOC paints may not radically change your business, but it will improve the lives of a few of your customers. For the successful business, customer service is always a priority.

Terri Pilcher holds a master's degree in health sciences, and is the Health & Safety Officer for Bill Pilcher Painting in Bel Air, MD.



choice. Michelle Miller explained that in addition to no-VOC paint, no-VOC caulk, spackle, and joint compound should be used, since they also out-gas. The Millers systematically experimented while renovating properties to find the best techniques and products for hypersensitive people. They offer their findings at SaferBuilding.com where their how-to guides for interior painting are among their most

make a noticeable difference in most painters' businesses," he said. "People are more price conscious than health conscious."

No-VOC paints cost 20-30 percent more than low-VOC paint offered by major paint manufacturers. Since painting is a labor-intensive business, this results in approximately only a five percent overall increase in the estimated price of the job. If you have a cus-

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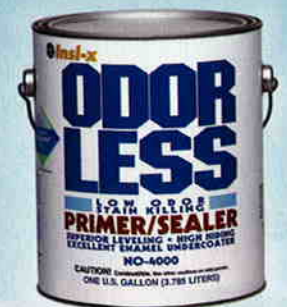
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