

Formaldehyde in China: Are your cabinets giving your kid cancer??



After initial research done by the Shanghai Children's Hospital and Shanghai Environmental Protection Industry Association in a study last year, the answer is: [well, yeah maybe](#). In a study of 30 children with leukemia, it was discovered that 15 came from homes with furniture or decor with excessive formaldehyde discharge.

Formaldehyde is a chemical binding agent used in things like interior paint, furniture, wood flooring, particle board, carpet and wall paper, to name a few. It's most prevalent in new homes and furnishings, and becomes much worse during warm weather.

The suggested link between formaldehyde and cancer is nothing new. It has been proven to cause certain kinds of nasal cancer and has been found in multiple studies to be linked with leukemia.

And the more you do research on harmful indoor chemicals in China, the more it appears that this study on Shanghai child cancer patients is just a drop in the bucket.

A slew of other recent reports have found Chinese homes and work spaces basically swimming in formaldehyde. Berkely [released a study last January](#) specifically examining exposure levels and health effects in China. Here's one disturbing excerpt from their conclusion:

Although the Chinese government has implemented a series of standards to regulate formaldehyde, the lack of enforcement has resulted in only limited success in controlling exposures. Consequently, a large number of Chinese individuals continually encounter multiple

sources of formaldehyde exposure every day. These include: environmental, occupational, residential and contaminated food.

Given the magnitude of formaldehyde exposure in China, both in terms of the number of people exposed and the levels of formaldehyde exposure, the potential health consequences of formaldehyde are of serious concern. The number of case reports on a wide range of formaldehyde-induced health effects, including poisoning and cancer, has multiplied dramatically in recent years.

Another study revealed that of 1,243 families surveyed, 67.5% showed excess formaldehyde levels. Even worse, 54.2% showed high levels of volatile organic compound, or TVOC. That's a nasty mix of pollutants found most often in things like paint, glues, carpet and wall paper. And TVOC includes the chemical benzene, which has been proven without a doubt to cause leukemia when over-exposed.

Most countries carefully regulate and monitor the amounts of indoor chemicals allowed in new buildings, although China's been the culprit in more than a few public health mishaps abroad. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Chinese-supplied mobile homes (and FEMA, the US organization responsible for purchasing them) were blamed for [exposing thousands of people to toxic chemicals](#).

Emergency shelters have been a problem in China as well. Formaldehyde levels in mobile homes supplied to victims of the Sichuan earthquake were found to be almost six times the allowed amount. The exposure was blamed for hundreds of [miscarriages in Dujiangyan](#).

If this new study by the Children's Hospital can establish a more clear link between formaldehyde exposure and children's leukemia, that will be at least one more reason for the government to step up regulation on the chemicals.

Letting new apartments and office buildings sit vacant for at least a few months has been proposed in reaction to a study showing 90% of newly completed homes can't meet regulations.

Planning to renovate your apartment? If you have kids, [you might want to reconsider](#):

It's reported that as many as 2.1 million children die of respiratory infections in China due to pollutions during renovation. About one million children under five have died of indoor air pollution. Studies show home renovations are hazardous to children's health in five ways: first, it induces blood diseases, second, it increases the chance of asthma, thirdly, it causes congenital anomalies in children, four, it triggers neonatal heart diseases, and fifth, it significantly hinders intellectual development in the children.

So now, if you're terrified, here are a list of things you can do to try and avoid poisoning yourself and your loved ones:

- Don't move in to a newly finished building (if you must, try to give it three to six months)
- Don't renovate or paint anything. Ever.

- Open windows, increase ventilation. If you're really paranoid, buy an air ventilation unit
- Jack up the AC - hot and humid air can increase formaldehyde levels
- Get some plants and a fish, formaldehyde is water soluble (if you hate fish, you could just leave out glasses of water, which would also cover you in a Signs-esque alien invasion)
- Try to avoid buying things made of particle board

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