

# WHAT MAKES A HEALTHY HOME?



*A Guide for Landlords  
and Tenants*

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## INTRODUCTION

This resource book is intended to be used as a guide for both landlords and tenants to help maintain a healthy living environment in the home. The book provides helpful tips and easy solutions for common issues including mold and mildew, getting repairs made, and who to call for information in your community. Tenants and landlords both have responsibilities for maintaining healthy and decent homes, and this guide will help both work together to create a healthier community for everyone!

Throughout this guide there are boxes that discuss landlord and tenant responsibilities. These boxes can help landlords and tenants participate in a partnership approach to solving problems in rental homes.

## SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF A HEALTHY HOME



= **DRY**



= **CLEAN**



= **SAFE**



= **VENTILATED**



= **PEST-FREE**



= **MAINTAINED**



= **CONTAMINANT-FREE**

Before we get into specific topics, it's helpful to know the seven principles of a healthy home.

As you use this guide to look at common healthy home topics, you'll find that these principles overlap a lot of times, and that if you are following these principles as a whole, you will be addressing the causes of many healthy home issues that commonly occur.





## **MOLD & MOISTURE**

Lots of moisture in a home can lead to mold. Mold can make you sick, and can be especially troublesome if you have asthma. Working with your landlord, and taking a few steps in the home, can make a big difference. When moisture problems occur in rental properties, conflicts may sometimes occur when trying to correct them. You should always give your landlord the opportunity to correct building defects and should immediately notify your landlord when you notice moisture problems. Alternatively, as a tenant, you have the responsibility to immediately repair moisture problems for which you are responsible.

### **Manage Moisture**

- Maintain humidity below 50%. Using air conditioning or a dehumidifier will help.
- Use a humidistat; it's like a thermometer but measures humidity levels. You can purchase a humidistat for about \$5 at many hardware stores.



## Before renting an apartment or house

Carefully inspect the apartment for evidence of moisture problems such as stained carpeting, water stains on walls or ceilings. Pay close attention to plumbing locations. Take note of musty odors. If you or other residents have asthma or other respiratory conditions, you may wish to avoid units with evidence of water damage, older carpeting, and smoking.

# Together

## LANDLORDS AND TENANTS CAN PREVENT AND SOLVE MOISTURE PROBLEMS

LANDLORDS	TENANTS
Ensure that all fans are in proper working order and are ventilated outside of property (bathroom, stovetop, laundry room).	Use all fans when bathing/showering, doing laundry, cooking.
Regularly inspect that gutters are in good working order. Repair gutter leaks immediately.	Communicate plumbing, window, doorway or other water leaks to landlord immediately.
Make sure windows are well sealed.	Heat and ventilation help prevent mold. Keep your home as warm as possible (68 degrees is good to prevent mold), while also keeping it well ventilated.

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## **MOLD & MOISTURE** *cont'd*

### **Resolving conflict**

Oregon Law is currently limited when it comes to housing codes around mold, but the City of Portland, Gresham, and Multnomah County all have some code that addresses mold in the home. Tenants have certain rights where conditions in the home affect health or safety of the tenant.

In resolving conflict, you should always first contact your landlord and describe the condition you are concerned about. Document the condition in detail including photos, date, time, who you notified and when.

Call your local health department and/or housing/building inspector and describe the mold and/or moisture condition you are concerned about. Either authority may be able to help confirm the problem and recommend an appropriate remedy.

# GREEN CLEANING

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Green cleaning is using cleaning products that don't endanger you, children or the environment. This is especially important for people who have asthma. Commercial cleaning products often contain irritants that can trigger an asthma episode. The green cleaning products recommended here are effective, inexpensive and safe for you and the environment.

## All-purpose cleaners

Mix ingredients for each recipe in a spray bottle. Use for cleaning countertops, floors, walls, carpet and upholstery.

### General cleaner

1. Dissolve 4 tablespoons baking soda in one quart of warm water.
2. Add 1/2 cup vinegar to between 1 cup and 1 quart of warm water.
3. Combine 1/4 cup distilled white vinegar, 1/2 teaspoon vegetable oil-based liquid soap and 3/4 cup warm water. Shake to blend.  
For really big jobs, combine 1/2 cup distilled white vinegar, 1/4 cup vegetable oil-based liquid soap and 2 gallons of warm water in a pail and stir to blend.

### Tub and sink cleaner - baking soda, liquid soap

Sprinkle baking soda on the porcelain fixtures and rub with wet rag. Add a little of the liquid Murphy's soap to the rag for more cleaning power. Rinse well to avoid leaving a hazy film.

### Window and mirror cleaner - White vinegar, water

Put 1/4 cup of white vinegar in the spray bottle and fill to the top with water. Spray on the surface. Rub with a lint-free rag. For outdoor windows, use a sponge and wash with warm water with a few drops of Murphy's or castile soap. Rinse well and squeegee dry.

### Linoleum floor cleaner - White vinegar, water

Mop with a mixture of 1/2 cup vinegar in a bucket of warm water. The vinegar odor will go away shortly after the floor dries.





## HAZARDOUS HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS

Some of the common products we use in our homes and yards can hurt people, fish, and wildlife if used or disposed of incorrectly. Bleach, rat poison, mothballs, lighter fluid, oven cleaner, batteries, mercury thermometers, gas, oil, wood polish, toilet and drain cleaners, shoe polish, and bug spray are items many of us have in our homes.



As with any product, follow the directions on the label. Doing things that are not on the label is risky for the health of you and your family. Children's bodies are small so even a little bit of some chemicals can cause big problems!

# HAZARDOUS HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS *cont'd*

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## **Questions to ask:**

### ***Do you use hazardous products safely?***

This can apply both for the products you use in your home, but also products your landlord may use.

### ***Are they adding fertilizer to grass that your children play on, using sprays for insects?***

Always read directions, and look for words like “caution,” “flammable,” “harmful,” “danger,” and “poison”.

Look for special instructions on the label, such as “work in well-ventilated area” or “wear protective clothing”

Be ready in case of accident, and have the poison control center number where you can find it.

### ***Can you cut down on the hazardous products in your home?***

Try some of the green cleaning recipes, and other tips, like using a plunger instead of drain cleaner for those pesky clogs!

Integrated pest management (IPM) uses common sense to reduce sources of food, water and shelter for pests and takes advantage of all pest management strategies including careful use of pesticides when necessary. (Environmental Protection Agency). You can work with your landlord to encourage the practice of integrated pest management.

### **To protect your family's health:**

- Buy only what you need to do the job.
- Read and follow directions on product labels –always!
- Post the Poison Control Center telephone number next to the phone.
- Never mix two products together unless you are certain it is safe to do so.
- Never mix bleach and ammonia.
- Keep all hazardous products, including bleach, in a cabinet out of reach of children.
- Buy products in their original containers. If you transfer any products, be sure to label the new container.
- Give leftover products to someone else to use.

### **Disposal issues:**

- Find out about your community's hazardous waste collection points.
- Recycle products that you can – oil, antifreeze, products with mercury.
- Never burn or dump leftover products or containers.
- Call Metro Hazardous Waste Disposal at 503-234-3000 with questions about collection, recycling and disposal.

# HAZARDOUS HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS *cont'd*

*Together*

## LANDLORDS AND TENANTS CAN REDUCE HAZARDOUS HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS IN AND AROUND THE PROPERTY

LANDLORDS	TENANTS
Use “green” (chemical-free) lawn treatment whenever possible.	Replace bleach disinfectants and household cleaner with vinegar and hydrogen peroxide.
Use “green” pesticides whenever possible.	Talk to your landlord about chemical practices.
Communicate to your tenants when you must use pesticides for cockroaches, rodents, bedbugs, ants, bees, etc., so your tenant can vacate property during application.	Use traps instead of chemicals for insects and pests.
If property has a shed that contains lawn chemicals, pesticides, or fertilizers, make sure the shed is locked.	Dispose of all chemicals properly - never down the sink, on the ground, down a storm drain or in your garbage can.



## CLEAN & PEST-FREE

### Pets

Furry pets like dogs, cats, and gerbils can cause asthma and allergy attacks because of their saliva and skin flakes. If you do have pets inside, make sure to keep them out of sleeping areas and off fabric-covered furniture. It's also a good idea to wipe your pet's paws before letting them inside.

### Control Pests

Roaches and rodents can trigger asthma and allergies. They need food, water, warmth, and shelter to survive. You can control roaches, mice, and other pests by making these things hard to get.

#### ***Here are some tips to keep pests away:***

- Store food in tightly sealed containers.
- Clean up crumbs and spills right away.
- Empty your garbage often.
- Wash your dirty dishes right after eating.
- Don't leave out pet food or water overnight.
- Fix plumbing leaks and drips.
- Seal cracks where roaches and other bugs hide or get into your home.
- Manage insects, like cockroaches, which can be a significant source of allergens.
- Vacuum frequently, preferably with a HEPA vacuum (a HEPA vacuum has a filter capable of removing particles as small as 0.3 microns at 99.97% efficiency).

## **CLEAN & PEST-FREE** *cont'd*

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### **Keep Down Dust Mites**

Use zippered plastic mattress and pillow covers beneath sheets and pillowcases. You can buy them at your local department store or through the mail. If the mattress cover is uncomfortable, put a mattress pad over it.

Wash bedding, including blankets, pillow covers, and mattress pads in hot water every week. Temperatures above 130 degrees F kills dust mites.

*Although pets can be a source of affection, they can also be a source of allergens. Pets can track in pollen and other things not healthy for you if they spend time outdoors.*



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## KEEP IT CLEAN

### Action Steps

#### Pay Attention to Your Asthma and Allergies

Know what triggers you or your children's asthma or allergies. Talk to a doctor or nurse about keeping emergency medicine around if your asthma or allergies are severe. If someone you love takes asthma or allergy medications make sure they know when to take it.

### Healthy Housekeeping

Clean your home often. Since cleaning puts dust into the air, have someone without asthma or allergies do it. Wear a dust mask if you can't find somebody else to clean. You can buy one at a drug store.

Keep clutter down. Clutter collects dust and makes it harder to keep a clean home. Store your belongings in plastic or cardboard boxes instead of keeping them in piles or stacks. You can move the boxes to make cleaning easier.

When possible, don't have carpeting or rugs. Hard floors (vinyl, wood, or tile) are much easier to keep dust-free. If you do have rugs or carpet, vacuum with a special HEPA (High Efficiency Particle Air) filter to get rid of dust. Call your local or state health department for more information.

# BOOKMARK

A P A R T M E N T S



Smoke Free Building





## **SMOKE-FREE HOUSING**

It's important for anyone concerned about their personal health to make the choice to not smoke, or to try and quit, but what can renters do about secondhand smoke?

1. Ask about the smoking policy – smoking rules should be listed in the rental agreement.
2. If the policy is not in writing, confirm the policy with the landlord in the company of a friend who does not live there.
3. After moving in, you can ask your neighbors if they would smoke somewhere else, especially if second-hand smoke is entering your place through ducts or vents.
4. You can work with your landlord to make reasonable accommodation requests, for example, increased ventilation, if you have respiratory issues, and a note from a doctor.

### **Smoking in common areas is against the law in Multnomah County.**

- Residential facilities must be smokefree in all common areas, including lounges, hallways and laundry rooms.
- If people are smoking in common areas in your building, you can call the Multnomah County Smoke-free Worksite info line at 503-988-4163.

# SMOKE-FREE HOUSING

*cont'd*

## Landlord Information

Many landlords find that it takes a lot of energy and money to repaint, replace carpet, and turn over apartments where tenants have been smoking indoors. It is also a fire hazard and liability.

Landlords can adopt a no-smoking rule, just as you might prohibit pets.

*Together*

## LANDLORDS AND TENANTS CAN REDUCE SMOKE HAZARDS

LANDLORDS	TENANTS
Create a smoke-free policy for property and provide to all tenants upon moving in.	If you smoke, always smoke outside of building.
Thoroughly wash all walls and floors and repaint after a smoker vacates property prior to new tenant moving in.	Ask your neighbors if they would smoke somewhere else, particularly if secondhand smoke is entering your unit.



## **Most renters prefer smoke-free housing**

- Three quarters would rather live in a non-smoking building.
- 52% would pay extra rent.
- Three quarters say it is ok for landlords to prohibit smoking inside rental units to keep second-hand smoke from drifting into other units.
- Most renters, regardless of income, age, or gender, would prefer a no-smoking rule.
- Over a third of renters in multi-unit buildings say they are regularly exposed to a neighbor's second-hand smoke.

*(Market survey report "Smoke free rental housing in the Portland metro area"  
Campbell Delong resources, inc. 2006)*

*You can visit [www.smokefreeoregon.com/housing](http://www.smokefreeoregon.com/housing) for more information*

## LEAD



Lead poisoning is one of the most serious health threats for children in and around the home. Your children can be poisoned if they get lead in their bodies, from sources such as lead dust or lead-based paint, and it can cause learning and behavior problems. It can also damage hearing and the brain.

### Questions to ask:

1. Does your child spend time in an old home or building built before 1978?
2. Has your child recently spent time in a home or building built before 1978 where **repairs** and/or **remodeling** is being done?
3. Has your child recently spent time in a home or building built before 1978 where painting is being done inside or outside the home?
4. Does your child have a sibling who has lead poisoning or does your child know anyone with lead poisoning?
5. Does your child spend time with anyone who uses lead in their work or hobbies?
6. Do you use imported pottery, ceramics, lead crystal or pewter for cooking or storing/serving food?
7. Has your child ever taken traditional or home remedies or used make-up imported into the U.S.?
8. Has your child visited or lived outside of the U.S. in the last 6 months?
9. Do you have concerns about your child's behavior or development?

## LEAD *cont'd*

- Have children tested for lead. Call your doctor or the Multnomah County Leadline at 503-988-4000 for free tests.
- Wash children’s hands frequently and before meals.
- Test the water. Either call the Leadline or visit [www.LEADLINE.org](http://www.LEADLINE.org).
- Wet-mop floors and use damp cloths for windowsills and dusting.
- Be careful when remodeling. Always use lead-safe practices.
- Your landlord should talk to you about lead hazards when you move in, and you should ask your landlord if you are concerned if they have tested the soil and paint.

*Together*

### LANDLORDS AND TENANTS CAN PREVENT AND/OR REDUCE THE RISK OF LEAD POISONING

LANDLORDS	TENANTS
If home is older than 1978, when possible replace old windows with new windows.	Wet clean the home regularly, particularly window sills.
If exterior is repainted, do not dry sand or blow torch existing paint.	Minimize opening and closing windows that have old, peeling and chipping paint.
Cover areas of lawn that do not have grass with new soil.	Ask your doctor about getting your child tested for lead.
Maintain chipping & peeling paint.	Use a HEPA filter vacuum.

## HOME SAFETY



Did you know that you are more likely to get hurt at home than at work or school? The leading causes of death in the home are falls, drowning, fires, poisoning, suffocation, choking and guns. Luckily, there are some simple action steps you can take to protect both you and your family.

Very young children and older adults are the most likely to get hurt at home. It's important to keep the age of the people in the home in mind when thinking about how to keep everyone safe.

### **Talking to Your Landlord About Safety Issues**

- Your landlord has some responsibility to work with you keeping a home safe for you and your family, including fire alarms, safe railings, and non-slip mats for stairs.
- If you notice something that is unsafe, write a letter to your landlord, or speak with them directly about your concerns.
- If there are rugs in your home, use no-skid mats and throw rugs.
- Keep your home well-lit so you can see where you're walking at night.

## HOME SAFETY *cont'd*

### Slips, Trips and Falls

- Keep your floors clear of anything that may cause tripping
- Pick up hazards such as toys, shoes and magazines
- Clean up spills right away (this will also reduce the likelihood of mold growth)
- Repair any stairs that are cracked and/or worn

### Keep Safety in Mind

- Do not overload electric outlets
- Always put out candles when going to bed or leaving the home

*Together*

### LANDLORDS AND TENANTS CAN PREVENT INJURIES IN THE HOME

LANDLORDS	TENANTS
Inspect stairway railings regularly and repair immediately if loose or broken	Communicate needed repairs immediately to landlords
Check smoke detectors regularly to ensure good working order	Keep floors clear of anything that may cause tripping

# HOME SAFETY

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*cont'd*

## Poison Proof Your Home

Refer to section on hazardous chemicals, but if you do have hazardous and or poisonous materials in your home, you will want to poison proof your home so your children and animals cannot get sick.

- The kitchen is one of the most dangerous places for your child. Drain openers, detergents, oven cleaners, and other cleaners can hurt you and your children. Keep all chemicals out of reach of children. Sometimes, children get into products as you are using them, so if possible, keep your children out of the room while you are cleaning.
- The bathroom has many things that can be dangerous, especially in the medicine cabinet. Things like medicines, make-up and mouthwash can all be dangerous for your child. Best step: keep everything out of reach of children.
- Garage and basements have some of the most dangerous things in them. Bleach, antifreeze, gasoline and kerosene, paint and paint removers, bug spray and more can all be dangerous, so keep kids out of these areas, or follow the general rule of “out of reach.”



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## RESOURCES

### For More Information

For more information, questions and other resources, call the Healthy Homes Infoline at the Multnomah County Environmental Health division - 503.988.3400 or visit <https://multco.us/health/staying-healthy/keeping-your-home-healthy>

### Acknowledgements/Credits

- National Center for Healthy Housing
- Community Alliance of Tenants
- Bureau of Development Services, City of Portland
- Multnomah County Health Department  
Environmental Health Division
- Multnomah County Health Department  
Tobacco Prevention Program
- Community Energy Project
- Bureau of Housing & Community Development, City of Portland



# FLOOR PLAN - Example

It's important to think about all the rooms in your home when using this guide. Each room has different healthy home principles that apply. Use the guide to think of what principles go with each room and then you can draw your own!



= DRY



= VENTILATED



= CLEAN



= PEST-FREE



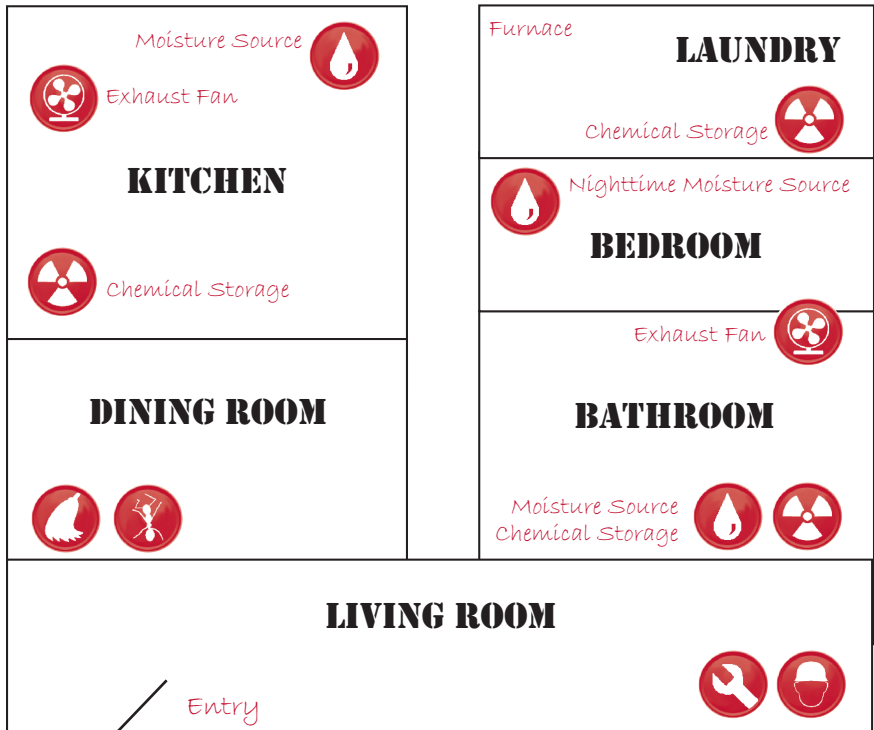
= SAFE



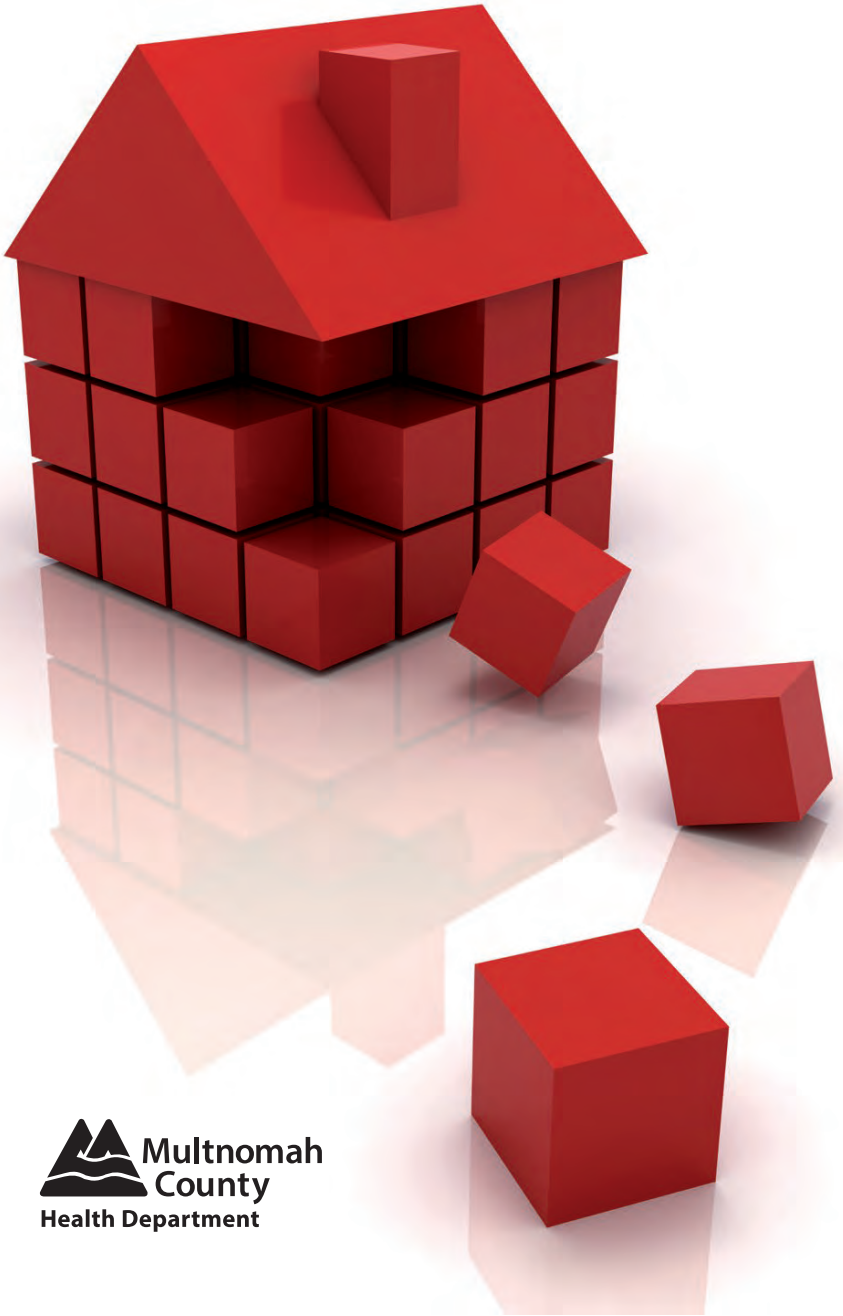
= MAINTAINED



= CONTAMINANT-FREE







 **Multnomah  
County**  
Health Department