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**Is That Apartment Hazardous to Your Health?**

**By dan the roommate man**

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When you sign a lease committing yourself to a unit in an apartment complex or building, you're agreeing to live in close quarters with strangers. You're also making the assumption that your building will be properly managed and maintained. That includes such factors as air quality and adequate pest control. As a tenant, you have rights, of course, but some of the most serious threats to your health — such as carbon monoxide — are ones you can't even see or smell.

Particularly scary is the prospect of seepage through soil. A landlord's efforts to maintain his or her own property can be nullified by pollution from a nearby commercial facility or poorly maintained residential property. Chemicals such as lead, pesticides can seep into the soil and find their way into the water and air of tenants living in better-maintained properties nearby. An environmental inspection is a landlord's best defense against allegations or plummeting property values.

You've almost certainly heard of "Sick Building Syndrome," which has almost become a cliché in recent years. While this condition often is associated with office facilities, home environments are not exempt from this plague by any means. Common symptoms of Sick Building Syndrome — including eye irritation and respiratory difficulties — may be traced to a variety of sources in your apartment building, including your the paint on your walls, a chemical used anywhere on the property (such as toluene, for example), your air conditioning unit, clogged air filters in need of changing, and/or the growth of bacteria spurred by high humidity, poor maintenance or both.

If you're experiencing symptoms of Sick Building Syndrome on a persistent basis, you should report them immediately to your landlord. Your lease should include a clause in reference to your landlord's obligation to see that such duties as changing air filters are performed regularly. If it doesn't contain such language, make sure you get it in writing before you sign a lease. Furthermore, tenants should be entitled to regular equipment inspection and timely maintenance.

Another air pollutant of which you should be aware is asbestos — again, usually associated with commercial properties, but multifamily housing is not exempt. Within multifamily properties, asbestos has been found in caulking, in material wrapped around pipes, and in ceiling material. According to

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environmental scientists, insulation installed in multifamily, single-family and commercial properties between 1935 and 1978 contained as much as 50 percent asbestos. Insulation in the vast majority of such properties has been replaced or contained; however, some poorly maintained buildings continue to present a threat to their tenants. When inhaled over a prolonged period, asbestos can cause lung tissue to stiffen, contributing to lung cancer and/or heart disease. Landlords who are notified after an inspection that their properties contain asbestos must take appropriate action, which includes disclosing this information to present and prospective tenants.

Lead-based paint and other lead-containing materials (including mini-blinds) also have received considerable attention in recent years. The Residential Lead-Based Paint Hazards Reduction Act, passed in 1992, requires landlords and sellers of pre-1978 properties to disclose the presence of lead-based paint or other lead-based materials to prospective buyers or tenants.

The subject of numerous articles in recent years, carbon monoxide is one of the most serious and most common air pollutants present in multifamily housing. Fireplaces, gas or oil stoves, or gas or kerosene space heaters are all common emitters of carbon monoxide. The good news is that you can protect yourself by purchasing a carbon monoxide detector. You can't always assume that your landlord has purchased one because these detectors are somewhat expensive. By all means, ask. Chances are good that you're going to have to take matters into your own hands and purchase one yourself. It won't hurt to ask if the purchase can be deducted from this month's rent, but don't count on it.

Turning to the subject of pest control, before you sign a lease, ask your landlord how often the property is sprayed to prevent infestation. Can you get his or her response in writing? Ground-floor residents are particularly prone to pesky visitors, including cockroaches, fleas, ants and rodents. If you spot any of these creatures even occasionally, call your landlord and report the problem immediately. Rodents, of course, are transmitters of disease, but roaches' bodies and their droppings actually contain substances which contribute to poor air quality and even respiratory problems — most notably, asthma.

If your prospective landlord doesn't volunteer information about the environmental quality of the building to which you're considering a move, ask. Odds are, of course, that you're going to hear a glowing report of the building's environmental quality, and while you shouldn't be cynical, get it in writing. After all, you're making a financial investment with your signature on that lease. If the landlord wants your patronage, he or she will comply without resistance. And if not, the renters' market is a competitive one; you won't have to look far to find a landlord who won't blink at your request. Happy — and healthy — hunting.

Since 1989 dan the roommate man has helped 1000's of people find rooms,apartments or roommates. Need help? Contact him at 800-487-8050 or [www.roommateexpress.com](http://www.roommateexpress.com)

## **Is Your Business Producing Hazardous Waste?**

### **By Envirogreen**

Environmental and health concerns have led to a widening of the definition of "hazardous waste". Most

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people assume that this term refers only to toxic, chemical or industrial waste, but in fact all businesses are probably now producing some form of hazardous waste that needs to be disposed of carefully and legally.

So, how do you know if you're about to throw away something that's classified as hazardous waste? Follow the checklist below, which isn't exhaustive, but which does cover everyday business items that you might throw in the skip without thinking about it:

· Fluorescent strip lighting · Acid lead, mercury and NiCad batteries · Pesticides, including domestic garden pesticides · Certain paints and decorating products · Oils · Solvents · Aerosols · Redundant IT equipment · Old televisions · Scrap cars · Fridges, freezers and air conditioning systems · Chemical, manufacturing or other industrial waste

If your business produces waste in any of these areas, you need to be sure that you are arranging legal disposal. In the UK, many local authorities have put aside areas at public waste sites where you can dispose of small quantities of hazardous waste, but if you produce any of the above regularly, or in any volume, you must arrange for a registered company to collect and dispose of it.

If you are unsure about the classification of the waste your business produces, then seek the advice of an expert. Hazardous waste disposal companies have the knowledge and experience to help you identify and categorise the waste you produce and give you advice on putting together a disposal plan. Depending on how much waste you produce, you can set up a regular collection facility which ensures that your waste is never allowed to build up beyond acceptable levels, and is always disposed of legally and safely.

If you don't have any provision for hazardous waste disposal, or you didn't realise that some of the items in the above list had be classified as hazardous, then you need to get advice as soon as possible.

Envirogreen is a leading UK hazardous waste disposal company, which can help businesses and homeowners get rid of hazardous waste safely and legally. Visit our website now by clicking on

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