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IAQ perspective:

From a Green Design and Build Baby Boomer

BY VICTORIA SCHOMER

Years ago, and I do mean years, a friend/client told me she was pregnant and needed to renovate a room in their home for their new baby. "Terrific" I thought. "I've got this."

I'd already been working for 10 years in the "straight" green building business, planning, designing and specifying for new builds and remodels. And I'd been in the "out there" business of the world with the chemically sensitive, searching for the toxin-free products that would work for these folks each with their own unique needs.

Our nursery game plan was not hard even back then. We tore up carpet, sanded and refinished floors – without any stain, using water borne, low VOC clear coats. We painted with safe paints, and used safe, mostly all-wood furniture. The baby mattress was made of metal, wool and organic cotton materials and, with a doctor's letter, sold to us without any flame retardant. Any fabrics, including sheets and 'baby bumpers' were cotton and washed before fabrication and installation. The home's HVAC system was clean, and there was a big window in the room for natural ventilation.

Done! I was confident I had done my best. We finished the job a month in advance of her due date to allow for any possible emissions out gassing. I complet-

ed the job, wished them well, and waited to hear from my friend to come see her new little blessing.

And so I did. I got word of her little boy's arrival, and soon was invited to come say "Hello."

I entered the new nursery and was shocked! I was immediately

struck by the strong smell of plastic! What had gone so terribly wrong? I looked around, and it was obvious. The room was full of all kinds of baby gifts and stuffed animals, rubber play things, and plastic baby toys from friends and well wishers.

And so we are reminded that the road to a healthy life is a complicated one. It takes our engaging of fine green design and building professionals, our own pro-active research into the fine print of that myriad of materials and products we bring into our

homes, and every morsel of food or chemical we consume.

We continue to fight a tremendous battle to gain transparency from the thousands of companies that we support every day.

And so I conclude my story from long ago with a short list of what we have



This was prior to our discovery that there are serious health implications associated with BPA soft plastics and the flame retardants mandated on baby clothes and toys. We were then in a no-man's land of chemical emissions brought into our best-designed green and healthy project.

And yet still today, despite all types of green labels and certification, this scenario must get repeated countless times, all over the planet on even the most sustainably designed, highest labeled, green building projects.

today that can get us started, and keep us up-to-date (see inset box). These are some good resources for researching those better, safer, healthier, greener consumer products with which we fill our green-built homes.

Since 1998, Vicki Schomer has been an activist and spokesperson for the green design and building profession. She is a n award-winning ASID interior design, USGBC LEED accredited Professional, REGREEN co-author, a designer and consultant for sustainable planning, remodeling and green product specifying, and a Realtor specializing in identifying adaptable, and "green-able" properties.

Indoor Air Quality Resources:

- Green Seal (for green and non-toxic products)
- ENERGY STAR Builder's Guide to IAQ – ENERGY STAR Indoor Air Package Brochure
- Guide to Mold, Moisture and Your Home – US EPA's guide providing information and guidance for homeowners and renters on how to prevent and deal with mold
- Healthy House Institute – The resource for a better, safer indoor environment
- North Carolina Radon Program – NC Department of Environmental and Natural Resource's information on radon
- The American Indoor Air Quality Council – Promotes awareness, education and certification in the field of Indoor Air Quality
- US EPA Indoor Air Quality – Information about mold, air quality, asthma, and tips for how to handle mold in your home

How does your home measure up?

Created by the WNC Green Building Council, Green Gauge offers comprehensive, affordable home assessments to residents across North Carolina.

Interested in remodeling and don't know where to start?
Have an assessment done and learn about easy ways to save energy, water and money in your home.

Putting your home on the market?
Provide buyers with a Green Gauge Assessment in order to highlight your home's green features in a simple, easy-to-read format.

Buying a home?
Use Green Gauge to compare the energy and water efficiency of homes - helping you understand the true cost of home ownership.

Green Gauge assesses homes for energy and water efficiency, site walkability and landscape ecology, indoor air quality, and sustainable material usage.

To learn more, or to schedule your Green Gauge Home Assessment, contact the WNC Green Building Council

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