

# BREATHE HEALTHIER AIR IN YOUR HOME

A Consumer Guide  
to Residential Indoor  
Air Quality Investigations



Canada 



Do you know that poor indoor quality (IAQ) in the home can affect the health of the occupants? Excessive moisture, mold, pets, lifestyle, chemical contaminants and carbon monoxide are some things that can cause indoor air quality problems. The good news is that there are ways to deal with problems and improve the quality of the air.

Most of the time, you can solve an IAQ problem yourself. CMHC's *The Clean Air Guide* is a good reference to start with. But occasionally, solving an IAQ problem may require a professional's investigation. These are some answers to questions you may have about IAQ investigations.

## What is an IAQ investigation?



An IAQ investigation is an inspection of your home to determine if there are indoor air problems and to identify the sources and solutions.

## Is an IAQ investigation the same as a home inspection?



No. Home inspections, which are primarily for real estate purposes, document the condition and deficiencies of the home at the time of the inspection. They seldom include inspections for indoor air quality purposes. An IAQ investigation focuses on indoor air quality concerns.

## How can I tell if I need an IAQ investigation?



An IAQ investigation may be needed for a number of reasons:

- 1 You are about to undertake a renovation. Making sure the air quality is improved is a good idea.
- 2 You suspect a problem but you don't know what to do. There may be a history of flooding, roof leak or a previous fire.
- 3 You can see mold, but it keeps coming back after cleaning.
- 4 There may be an odour in the house that cannot be explained or removed.
- 5 You suspect symptoms linked to the house. You may feel better when you are away from your house. Or, you associate the onset of symptoms with a specific event, such as moving to the house or a renovation. Friends or family may also experience symptoms while visiting.
- 6 Someone in the family may be sick or have allergies and you want to ensure the house is not contributing to health problems.



## Does an IAQ investigation include air testing?



Testing the air for molds and other contaminants, as a first step, is not recommended by CMHC. Laboratory tests give you limited information. Tests for a specific chemical contaminant can tell you if the chemical is present. Tests for molds can tell you the genus (family) or species of molds that are detected. The significance of the results is subject to interpretation. Furthermore, the results do not tell you the sources and how to correct the problems.

A building-science based inspection has proven effective in identifying IAQ problems and solutions. Taking remedial action is far more important than identifying individual contaminants.

## Shouldn't you find out if toxic molds are present?



When mold is found to be growing in a house, the solution is to clean it up and correct the cause. The currently accepted guidelines emphasize fixing the problem rather than identifying the type of mold. However, specific situations may require mold testing. The investigator will let you know if tests are advised.

## What if I suspect carbon monoxide?



Seek immediate help. If you suspect carbon monoxide, call a qualified heating contractor or your gas company to check your heating system. Carbon monoxide can be deadly.

CMHC's *About Your House—Carbon Monoxide factsheet* (62046).

Visit [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca) to view.

## What does an IAQ investigation cost?



Investigators set their own prices for their services. Costs for an investigation may range from \$400—\$500, but vary by location, complexity of the problem and travel time needed. The costs of any laboratory testing are usually additional.

## What do I look for in an IAQ investigator?



Find out what training the individual has taken. Ask what procedure the investigator is following and whether the investigator will give you a written report. Determine what you will receive for the investigation and for what price. The investigator should not be affiliated with a testing laboratory or remediation company, or selling you a product or a service other than an IAQ investigation.

Before you enter into an agreement for an IAQ investigation, ask for references and check with the Better Business Bureau.

How do I find someone in my area who is trained to use the CMHC Residential IAQ Investigation Procedure?



Contact CMHC at 1-800-668-2642.

Are investigators who use the CMHC Residential IAQ Investigation Procedure employees of CMHC?



No. The IAQ investigators who have completed the CMHC training are private consultants and are not employees or agents of CMHC. Any contract you enter into is between yourself and the investigator. CMHC assumes no responsibility or liability for the services performed by the IAQ investigator.



## How do I find a trained IAQ investigator?



Some engineering or consulting companies that provide IAQ investigations advertise in the Yellow Pages™. Find out what procedure they are using.

Some IAQ investigators have completed a training program based upon the CMHC Residential IAQ Investigation Procedure.

## What does the CMHC IAQ Investigation Residential Procedure involve?



An IAQ investigation using the procedures developed by CMHC includes:

- **gathering information** about your house, its history and any health concerns of the occupants;
- **conducting a comprehensive walk through** and documenting IAQ problems of the house at the time of the inspection;
- **analyzing how your house performs** based on the information collected;
- **writing a report** that identifies the problems, pinpoints their sources and recommends solutions.



## What are the benefits of hiring a trained professional to do an IAQ investigation?



A trained IAQ investigator is more likely to find the problems, determine the causes and provide the appropriate correction measures. You can avoid mistakes and unnecessary costs if the problems and solutions are properly evaluated.

## What should I receive from the IAQ investigator?



Any IAQ investigation should always include a written report providing an assessment of the problems, causes and recommended solutions. A written report that ranks the recommendations according to their importance and costs would make it easier for you to make decisions or take steps to correct the problems.

There likely will be too much information to remember if you receive only a verbal report. The onus would be on you to make notes yourself during the walk through and evaluate the merit of solutions suggested by the investigator.

[www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca)

1-800-668-2642

© 2002

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Revised: 2006

Reprinted: 2006, 2007