

The Air Around Us: Why Everyday Environments Matter More Than We Think

We rarely think about the air around us — yet it is one of the most important factors shaping our health, comfort, and ability to participate in daily life.

Most people spend nearly 90% of their time indoors, in homes, workplaces, schools, and public buildings. Within these environments, air can contain a complex mixture of substances released from everyday sources, including cleaning products, personal care items, building materials, furnishings, and routine activities.

While these exposures may go unnoticed, they contribute to overall indoor air quality — a shared environmental condition that affects everyone.



What Shapes Indoor Air Quality?

Indoor air is influenced by:

- Cleaning and fragranced products
- Building materials, furnishings and pesticides
- Ventilation and air exchange
- Daily activities within the space

Many of these sources release volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which can accumulate indoors, especially in enclosed or poorly ventilated environments.

Did You Know?

- People spend **up to 90% of their time indoors**
- Indoor air can sometimes contain **higher levels of certain pollutants than outdoor air**
- Everyday products — including cleaning supplies and personal care items — are common sources of indoor chemical exposure
- Reducing sources of emissions can significantly improve indoor air quality

Research shows that indoor environments can, at times, contain higher concentrations of certain pollutants than outdoor air — making indoor air quality an important, yet often overlooked, area of environmental health.

Why This Matters

Indoor air quality is not only a comfort issue — it is a population-wide exposure.

Emerging Canadian research on indoor air quality in office environments has shown that spaces implementing fragrance-free or lowest-emission practices can have substantially lower levels of airborne chemicals compared to those without such measures. These differences were observed even when ventilation systems were similar, highlighting the importance of reducing sources of emissions.

Beyond Ventilation

Ventilation plays an important role, but it is not always sufficient on its own.

When chemicals are continuously introduced into a space, increasing airflow may dilute concentrations, but it does not eliminate the source. In some cases, achieving similar reductions through ventilation alone would require significantly higher air exchange rates.

This is why **source control, or appropriate product choice** — reducing or eliminating unnecessary chemical emissions — is a key part of improving indoor air quality.

A Shared Environment

Indoor air is shared. The choices made within a space affect everyone who enters it.

For some individuals, these exposures are not just noticeable — they are limiting.