

We Mess Up Our Bird's Air

How owners can pollute thier birds air

By Rebecca Sweat

Fumes from household cleaners, teflon coated pots and pans, strong glues and air fresheners can be harmful to a bird.
Courtesy Sara Horner, Colorado

While birds are busy flapping their wings and launching feathers into the air, most bird owners are doing their own share of polluting indoor airspaces. How? They smoke, use nonstick coated pans on the stove (only to be forgotten about until fumes fill the kitchen), use household cleansers with ammonia or chlorine, bleach, disinfectants, deodorizers, hair sprays, aerosolized deodorants, insecticides, mosquito repellents, foggers, scented candles, incense and air freshener sprays in the presence of pet birds or in same room where the cage is kept. New carpet is installed using a very strong-smelling glue. Walls are painted with solvent-based paints with the bird in an adjoining room or being returned to the house when strong fumes are still present.

These are all smells that can be strong, unpleasant or irritating to human noses, but they can actually be deadly to pet birds. Of course, with some of these toxins (like burned non-stick item fumes and carbon monoxide), humans don't smell them at all.

What exactly happens to your bird's respiratory system when it is exposed to toxic fumes? According to Larry Nemetz, DVM, a birds-only veterinarian in Southern California, "The bird's lungs become irritated and bird's reaction to irritation is to dilute it. That means to flush fluid. The problem is when a bird gets fluids into its lung, it drowns."

Some of these fumes are acute — they can kill birds overnight, in hours or even in minutes. Usually it's one strong exposure to a noxious substance, and that's all it takes to cause the bird to die. Deadly acute toxins include the fumes emitted from overheated nonstick cookware, paint fumes, natural gas, carbon monoxide, bug bombs and insecticides, and petroleum fumes. Anytime your bird has inhaled any of these substances, it is an emergency situation.