

Keep Birds Safe During Remodeling

When you remodel your home avoid household toxins to keep your bird safe

By Susan Chamberlain

Choose water-based latex paints to remodel your home safely.

When remodeling a home, you'll need to think about your bird's safety, because there are numerous things in new or remodeled homes that can emit fumes toxic to pet birds. Unless otherwise certified, plywood and particleboard contain formaldehyde resins. Sealing exposed plywood with paint or laminates will help reduce emissions. New vinyl tile or linoleum can emit fumes harmful to pet birds, as can the glues and adhesives used to fasten them to floors. Lacquer, varnish and certain types of paint emit volatile organic compounds. Paint and related products are most toxic when they are wet and during the first few days of drying. Choose water-based latex paints to remodel safely, unless they contain aromatic hydrocarbons, cadmium, lead-based pigments, fungicides or bacteriostatic chemicals, most are safe to use in homes where birds are present.

New carpeting, carpet padding and adhesives produce chemical emissions that often include volatile organic compounds (VOCs) such as styrene and formaldehyde. It's no secret that formaldehyde emissions can cause headaches, nausea and other symptoms in humans, so imagine what these might do to pet birds. These emissions are also potentially carcinogenic. Some carpeting is treated with dyes, bleaches, stain and flame retardant, mildewcides and insecticides. Heat, humidity and steam cleaning will often release some of these pollutants into the air. The good news is that such emissions tend to decrease as the products age.

You can have carpeting and your birds, too. The following suggestions will help you remodel safely with your pet birds in mind. You'll also reduce the risk of exposure to harmful chemical emissions. Choose a low-VOC carpeting material, such as wool. Install your carpet over formaldehyde-free sub-flooring. Specify that the carpet be loose-laid instead of glued to the floor to avoid harmful glue fumes. Use padding made of natural fibers, synthetic felt products or natural rubber. Have carpeting unrolled and aired at the store for at least several days before delivery. Open the windows, and air your home and the newly carpeted room for several days before returning your birds to the area. Keep windows open as much as possible for several weeks. Instead of wall-to-wall carpeting, use area rugs that can be removed and washed. Tiles and hardwood floors are easier to clean anyway!

While research has indicated that some houseplants may have slight air purification benefits, they cannot be depended upon to do the job. Air filters will remove quantities of dust, dander, some bacteria, mold and other airborne debris from the indoor environment, but they should not be relied upon to remove airborne toxins from the air. Fresh air is your best air sanitizer.

You'll also need to periodically clean your carpet to remove toxins, dust, etc. Do this with a steam cleaner that uses only hot water, not chemicals. Remove your birds from the room and don't return them until the carpet has dried.

Remodeling your home should be fun and rewarded for both you and your birds. Just do it safely!