Module 6: Community Health
Topic 1 Content: Air Quality and Health

Introduction

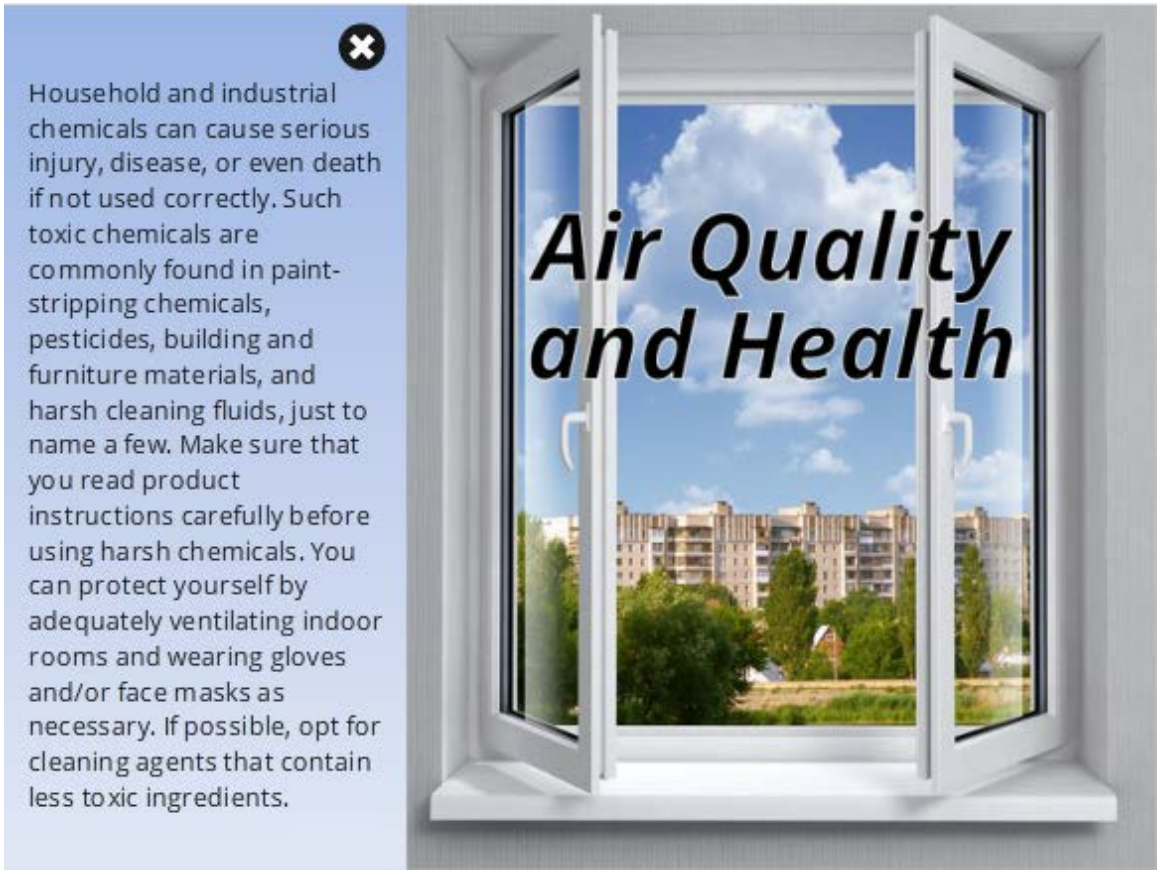
Most causes of outdoor air pollution come from human-made sources, such as fuel-burning transportation (cars, trucks, planes), animal agriculture, power plants, and industry. Natural sources of air pollution include volcanic eruptions and forest fires. The three major gases that pollute the air and contribute to climate change are carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide.

Air pollution does not exist exclusively outdoors; indoor air pollution poses serious risk to your health as well. Click each of the tabs below to learn some tips to minimize health risks related to indoor air pollution.

Particulate Matter

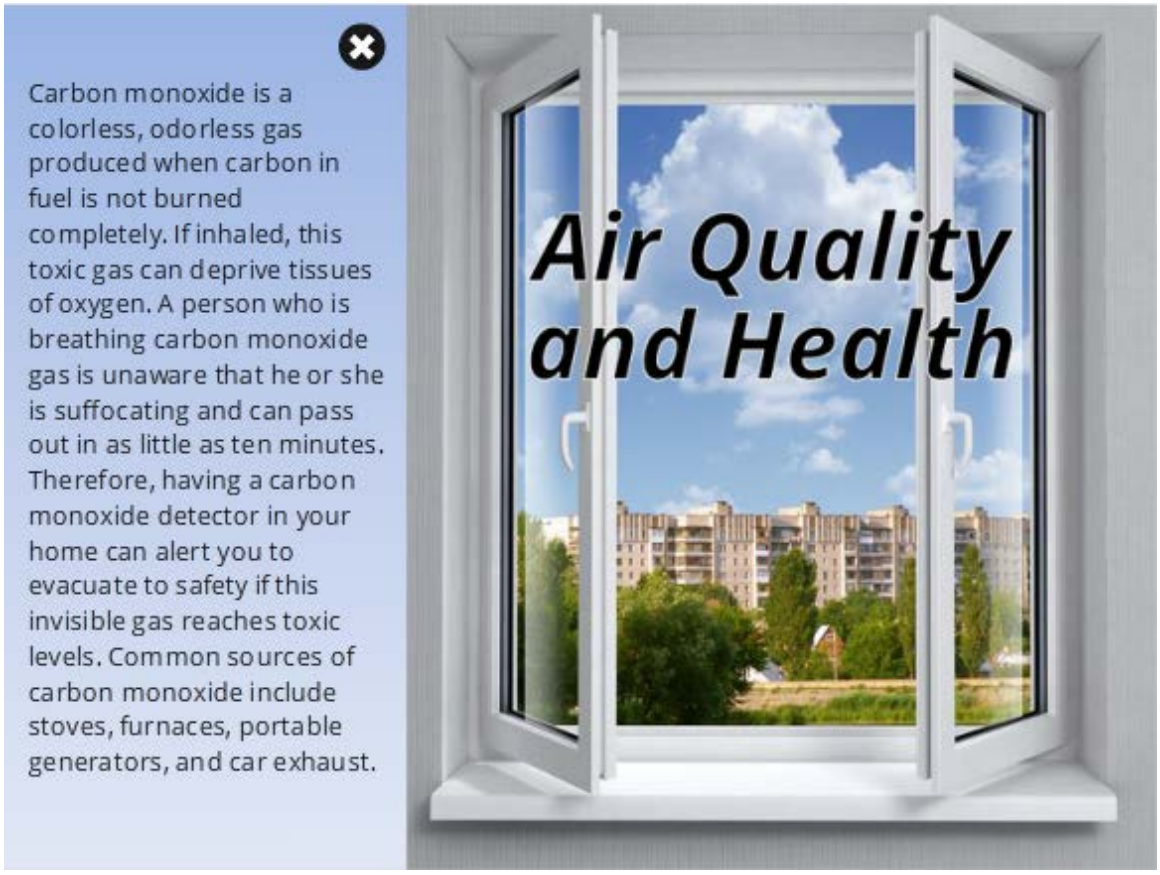
Particulate matter consists of tiny particles, such as dust, mold, smoke, soot, asbestos fibers, and droplets of liquid, found in both indoor and outdoor air. Breathing in particulate matter poses serious health risks, such as respiratory diseases and even heart attacks. Be vigilant about cleaning up mold outbreaks in your home, especially if you live in humid climates or areas prone to flooding. Also, avoid exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke as much as possible.

Hazardous Chemicals



Household and industrial chemicals can cause serious injury, disease, or even death if not used correctly. Such toxic chemicals are commonly found in paint-stripping chemicals, pesticides, building and furniture materials, and harsh cleaning fluids, just to name a few. Make sure that you read product instructions carefully before using harsh chemicals. You can protect yourself by adequately ventilating indoor rooms and wearing gloves and/or face masks as necessary. If possible, opt for cleaning agents that contain less toxic ingredients.

Carbon Monoxide



Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas produced when carbon in fuel is not burned completely. If inhaled, this toxic gas can deprive tissues of oxygen. A person who is breathing carbon monoxide gas is unaware that he or she is suffocating and can pass out in as little as ten minutes. Therefore, having a carbon monoxide detector in your home can alert you to evacuate to safety if this invisible gas reaches toxic levels. Common sources of carbon monoxide include stoves, furnaces, portable generators, and car exhaust.