

Connected to the Earth

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN & AROUND THE HOME

**“ALL THINGS ARE CONNECTED.
WHATEVER BEFALLS THE EARTH BEFALLS
THE CHILDREN OF THE EARTH.”**

—Chief Seattle, Suqwanish and Duwamish

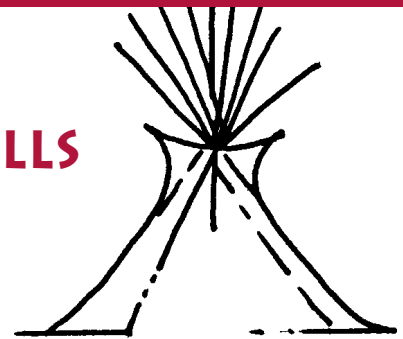
When we speak of the web of life, the sacred hoop of life or the sacred circle, we recognize that all life is interconnected. In today’s tribal cultures, *connection to the earth* means many things, including responsible use of natural resources and being ecologically minded. Today, as in our past, the air, fire and water are still connected in a cycle to the earth and to the Indian people.

What Is “Connected to the Earth?”

Connected to the Earth: Environmental Health in and Around the Home is a tool that you can use to check your home and property for pollution and health risks that can affect your family, your tribal community or the environment. From keeping your drinking water safe, to avoiding household hazards like lead-based paint, indoor air pollution and other risks, these fact sheets tell how to detect hazards and get started on reducing or eliminating them. **Even simple changes can make a big difference.**

Who Should Use This Packet?

This series of fact sheets contains practical information for Native Americans who want to minimize damage to the cycle of life by preventing environmental health risks within their homes and on their land. It is for anyone who wants to know how their home or land can affect the health of their family and their world. Whether you rent a room or own a house, these fact sheets can show you how to reduce your impact on nature and cut back your use of the earth’s resources. It can also help you notice pollution risks on your property *before* expensive problems happen.



What’s Inside?

The fact sheets in this packet cover topics that every resident or homeowner should understand. Each fact sheet has tables of assessment questions to help you find out which risks may apply to you. For some topics, this guide offers all the information you need to minimize or eliminate a pollution risk. For others, it provides a starting point and helps you locate further information. Keep in mind that laws and regulations can vary by state, county, city, town or reservation. Check with local officials to make sure that the changes you plan to make comply with the law.

Getting Started

This guide is based on *Home*A*Syst: An Environmental Risk-Assessment Guide for the Home*, published by the Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service, Ithaca, New York, publication # NRAES-87, April 1997. The original publication was compiled by Barbara Keen Avery, College of Human Ecology, Cornell Cooperative Extension and David J. Eagan, Home*A*Syst editor.

The text and illustrations were revised and edited September 2001 by Michael P. Vogel, Ed.D., Professor and Montana State University Extension Housing and Environmental Quality Specialist; Nate St. Pierre, Ed. D., Chippewa Cree, Director, MSU Office of Tribal Services; Franci Taylor, Choctaw and Cheyenne, Adjunct Instructor, MSU department of Native American Studies; and MSU Communications Services staff. Text illustrations: Jim Powers, The Art Department, Ithaca, NY; chapter heading illustrations: Franci Taylor; cover illustration: Marla Goodman. Contributing authors are listed at the end of each fact sheet.

Getting Started

You can do the fact sheets one at a time or all together. The main idea is to identify risks to your family's health or threats to your local environment. Then, where possible, to take actions to reduce those risks and prevent problems.

This publication will:

- Help you identify environmental risks in and around your home.
- Give you useful information about maintaining your home and saving money.
- Show you how to prevent hazards to your health and the environment.
- Tell you where to find further information as you need it.

With *Connected to the Earth*, nobody is looking over your shoulder to make sure you take preventive or corrective action. It is your choice. At the end of each fact sheet is an action checklist where you can write the risks you identified and make plans to improve any situations in your home that may harm your family or the environment.

Why Is It Important to Take Action?

Identifying risks alone won't prevent health risks. There are many good reasons to make the effort to correct environmental hazards in and around your home, particularly if you find medium or high risks...

Safeguard your health

You and your loved ones spend a lot of time in your home. If there are dangers in the air you breathe, in the water you drink, or from hazardous chemicals, they need to be eliminated. You are doing something good for your family by identifying and correcting health hazards now, rather than taking the risk of waiting until it's too late and someone's health has already suffered.

Prevent contamination of your water supply and other natural resources

Groundwater and surface water quality affects you, your neighbors, and others "downstream." Whether your drinking water comes from a private well or from a municipal system, everything is connected: What you do and what others do will affect someone else. By eliminating contamination hazards in and around your home, you do your part to protect everyone's water, land and natural resources. After all, if you don't do it, who will?

Protect your investment

Knowing about risks or problems today may help prevent costly cleanups, repairs, legal troubles, or problems with the resale of your home in the future. The way your neighbors care for their property makes a difference, too. Also, reducing your use of energy, water, or other resources can save you money.

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY – AND THE ENVIRONMENT!

Now It's Up to You...

Reading the fact sheets in this packet and taking action on health hazards that you discover may be one of the most important things you do to protect your family (and the environment!). If you have children at home, letting them help you with the checklists will teach them a lot about health, home maintenance and how their life-style can affect the environment. If you are interested in doing what you can to protect the health of your family and the environment, then using *Connected to the Earth*—and making changes—will be a worthwhile investment in your family's future.



What Should I Do First?

Begin with fact sheet 1, “Site Assessment: Protecting Water Quality Around Your Home,” because it gives basic information and helps you make a map of your property that will be useful as you work on other topics.

The checklist below is a quick way to scan for problem areas and decide which sections you may want to do first. If you note concerns on this checklist, or even *think* there may be risks or areas needing improvement, please read the fact sheet on that topic. If you don’t know the answer to one of the questions, you can look over the corresponding fact sheet to find out more.

If you check “yes” for any of the questions, there may be pollution risks or special health concerns you will want to investigate. Use the appropriate fact sheet to find out how to reduce these risks in and around your home.

Do This Checklist

Check the box at right for each question below.	YES	NO
Fact Sheet 1. Site Assessment: Protecting Water Quality Around Your Home		
Is your soil sandy or gravelly, allowing water to drain through quickly?		
Is there a potential source of contamination on your property (like manure, pesticide or fertilizer storage, a fuel tank, septic system drainfield, or eroding soils) located within 100 feet of a well, lake, stream, or wetland?		
Is the water table less than 10 feet below the soil surface?		
Fact Sheet 2. Preventing pollution from "Stormwater" Runoff		
Do your roof gutters empty onto paved surfaces instead of grass, mulch or gravel that lets rain soak into the ground?		
Are fertilizers, pesticides or salts stored where floodwaters might reach them?		
Are some parts of your property, particularly slopes, sparsely planted and without mulch, exposing the soil to erosion?		
Fact Sheet 3. Making Sure Your Drinking Water is Safe		
Has it been more than two years since your water was tested for bacteria and nitrates?		
Do you have a dug or driven well instead of a drilled well?		
Does your well casing extend less than 12 inches above the ground, or is there a low area where runoff can collect around it?		
Do you have abandoned wells on your property that are not properly filled and capped?		
Fact Sheet 4. Household Wastewater: Septic Systems and Other Waste Treatment		
Has it been more than three years since your septic tank was last pumped or inspected?		
Have you noticed any signs of a failing septic system, such as slow drains, odors or soggy ground over the drainfield?		
Do you have standard toilets and faucets, and not water-conserving fixtures?		
Fact Sheet 5. Hazardous Household Products		
Do you use products without knowing whether or not they are hazardous?		
Do you ever pour hazardous substances like antifreeze, oil, paints, stains, polishes or solvents down the drain, in a ditch or on the ground?		
Do you burn plastics, batteries or chemicals that could contaminate the air?		

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Checklist, cont.

Fact Sheet 6. Lead In and Around Your Home		
Was your home built before 1978 (the year when lead was banned from paint)?		
Do children under the age of six live in your home?		
Is paint inside and outside your home peeling, chipping or chalking?		
Does your water enter through lead pipes or pipes that contact lead solder?		
Fact Sheet 7. Yard and Garden Care		
If you use fertilizer, has it been longer than three years since you had your soil tested for nutrients?		
Do you ever use pesticides without reading the label or following the recommended doses or application instructions?		
Do you have bare areas of soil on your property that are susceptible to erosion?		
Fact Sheet 8. Fuels: Safely Using Gasoline, Heating Oil, Diesel and Other Fuels		
Do you store fuel for your lawnmower or other equipment in non-approved containers (like glass jars, plastic jugs or rusted cans)?		
Do you store fuel or heating oil in an underground fuel tank?		
If you have an above-ground fuel tank, does it lack protection against leaks or spills (such as a catch basin or concrete spill pad)?		
Fact Sheet 9. Indoor Air Quality: Health Risks in the Air You Breathe		
Do odors such as those from cooking linger in the air in your home?		
In winter, do you often notice condensation on the inside of your windows?		
Have you noticed symptoms (such as irritated eyes, coughing or sneezing) that most often develop when you stay indoors at home?		
Fact Sheet 10. Heating and Cooling Systems: Saving Energy and Keeping Safe		
Has it been two or more years since your fuel-burning heating system was inspected for proper ventilation and energy efficiency?		
Are your energy bills large for the size of your home? Do you feel cold drafts around windows and doors in winter?		
Does your attic lack the recommended amount of insulation?		
Fact Sheet 11. Dealing with Household Waste: And How to Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Compost		
Do you purchase products that you do not really need?		
Do you buy products wrapped in excessive packaging?		
Do you throw away yard and food waste that could be composted?		

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Begin fact sheets



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To obtain additional fact sheets in the Connected to the Earth series, contact your local Extension office or call Montana State University's Extension housing program at (406) 994-3451.