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breathe easy



In Australia, more than 80,000 tonnes of VOCs (volatile organic compounds) are released into the atmosphere annually, paint being a large contributor to this figure. Choose low- or zero-VOC paints, stains and primers rather than oil-based products. Manufacturers can provide material safety data sheets (MSDS) listing ingredients and their possible impact. If you're renovating a property built before 1970, test it for paint containing lead. Know the safety precautions you must take when working with lead-based paints, by reading the free government booklet *The Six Step Guide to Painting Your Home* (www.environment.gov.au). Research natural-fibre wallpapers, made from bamboo, sisal and straw.

Photo: Corbis Australia

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the paperless home



Ever heard of the paperless office? You can make a difference in your home by applying green workplace principles to paper conservation. Scan and keep documents electronically rather than in paper files. Opt to pay your bills and do your banking online with your bank and service providers. Research has shown that to pay a bill by cheque, 2.87 kg of materials need to be displaced and shifted, while paying online needs only 0.26 kg – the calculation that looks at these things is called material input per service (MIPS). Use recycled paper in your home printer, always print on both sides, and use old paper for scribble pads.