

# Healthy Indoor Environments

*Where We Live, Learn and Play*

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Georgia Healthy Housing  
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*NEAFCS 2025  
Award winning newsletter*

Find more information & tips about maintaining your home in the UGA Extension [Home Maintenance Checklist](#).

## Reducing Waste in Your Home

*Written by Rebecca Manville, Dougherty County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent*

Spring cleaning season is here, and it is the perfect time to reflect on our living spaces and make meaningful changes that promote a healthier environment. One of the most impactful ways to do this is to reduce waste in our homes. You've probably heard of the 3 Rs of waste management: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle, but let's add a fourth R – "Repair" – to further our ability to reduce waste.

- ◆ **Reduce.** It's important to be proactive and reduce waste on the front end, as some items can't be recycled and can create hazards if thrown away and sent to a landfill. Reduce waste by using items longer, reusing or repurposing them, buying used instead of new, and buying less. Try a challenge such as a "no-buy" month!
- ◆ **Reuse/Repurpose.** If you can't easily recycle something, think of ways to reuse or repurpose it. For example, turn old t-shirts into cleaning rags or quilts, use glass jars as vases, or use old toothbrushes to clean hard-to-reach areas.
- ◆ **Repair.** Not everything needs to be thrown away! With some needle and thread, glue, screwdrivers, and duct tape, you can fix almost anything. Holes can be patched, buttons sewn back on, or small parts replaced, rather than buying new items. If you don't know how to repair something, ask a friend or neighbor for help – and return the favor when they need help.
- ◆ **Recycle.** People are more likely to recycle if it is convenient. Make it convenient by knowing what can be recycled, understanding your community's recycling practices, and making recycling easy at home – centralize and label your bins!



*Image source:pixabay*

## Well Water and Radon

*Written by Amanda Harner, Monroe County Family and Consumer Sciences  
Extension agent*

Approximately 20% of Georgia residents rely on wells for their water needs. This percentage is significantly higher in rural counties, where it approaches 95%. Water is essential to maintaining our health. When we are connected to city or county water systems, there are systems in place that regularly test our water for common contaminants and high levels of naturally-occurring elements that could pose a risk to human health if exposure is too high. When we are on a well system, however, that responsibility falls to the owner and operator of the well.

Groundwater is the source of water for wells. It's important for homeowners on well water to understand that groundwater is typically safe, but it can become contaminated in various ways, including in natural disasters like flooding. Flooding can cause groundwater contamination with heavy metals from nearby industrial businesses. It can also cause an increased potential for harmful bacteria like E. Coli and Salmonella, or viruses like Norovirus, to enter our wells and our drinking water.

Groundwater can also carry elevated levels of naturally-occurring elements that are harmful to human health. A great example of this is radon. In Georgia, our land has a lot of granite above the Fall Line. Granite leaches uranium; radon is a gas that is released because of the natural breakdown processes of granite and uranium.

Radon is invisible and odorless, and that can pose serious health risks if it accumulates inside your home. If your home is on well water, it is important for the health of your family and your pets to regularly test your water. Your county UGA Extension office offers numerous water tests that will help you identify the levels of various elements and contaminants in your water. We also provide resources to guide you if you need to take action to make your water safe for drinking and personal hygiene. Find your county Extension office at [extension.uga.edu](http://extension.uga.edu).



*Image source: pixabay*



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## Be Prepared with a Natural Disaster Kit

*Written by Stephanie Benton, Early County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent  
Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent*

Natural disasters are not something we like to think about, but they can strike at any time. No matter where you live within the United States, natural disasters such as tornadoes, tropical storms, hurricanes, flooding and wildfires occur. The key to handling disasters is to be prepared. Having emergency supplies or a natural disaster preparedness kit on hand for emergency situations is important, because it includes essential supplies to keep you and your family self-sufficient for at least 72 hours.

### **What Should I Include in My Kit?**

Below is a chart of suggested items for your emergency kit. You can customize the list based on your family's needs.

#### ***Safety and Communication***

- ◆ Family communication plan (including written phone numbers and a reunification plan)
- ◆ Portable radio
- ◆ Flashlights and extra batteries
- ◆ Cell phone, charging cable and car adapter, fully-charged power bank
- ◆ Tools & whistle
- ◆ Fuel for vehicles
- ◆ Extra cash
- ◆ Important documents in waterproof container (will, insurance policies, passports, etc.)

#### ***Food and Drink***

- ◆ Bottled water (1 gallon per day per person)
- ◆ Nonperishable ready-to-eat foods (at least 3-day supply for everyone in the family)
- ◆ Infant formula and clean bottles
- ◆ Pet food (3-day supply for each pet)
- ◆ Paper products (toilet tissue, plates, cups, etc.) and disposable utensils
- ◆ Can opener/scissors/knife

#### ***Power and Cooking***

- ◆ Generator and extension cord
- ◆ Portable stove/grill, with charcoal & lighter fluid
- ◆ Matches/lighter

*continued on p. 4*



*Image source: pixabay*



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## Be Prepared with a Natural Disaster Kit

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### **Health and Cleanliness**

- ◆ Pet supplies (towels, cat litter, etc.)
- ◆ Medications
- ◆ First aid kit
- ◆ Clothes, shoes, rain gear
- ◆ Extra diapers for infants
- ◆ Disposable gloves
- ◆ Face masks
- ◆ Wipes and towels
- ◆ Sanitation supplies (bleach, cleaners, garbage bags, etc.)



*Image source: pixabay*

### **Storing Emergency Supplies**

Keep emergency supplies in an easily-accessible place in your home or garage. Keep items you would need for evacuation in a single box that can be grabbed quickly. Keep items needed for an extended stay at home together so you can find them easily.

### **Maintaining Emergency Supplies**

Be sure to check expiration dates on food (including pet food), baby formula, and medicines at

## **Asthma 101**

*Written by Quanzerria Dupree, Clayton County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent*

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that inflames a person's airways, causing symptoms like shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing, and tightness of chest. There is not a direct cause of asthma, but it can be linked to genetic makeup and environmental factors. Asthma attacks can be triggered by irritants and allergens. Common irritants include air pollution, strong perfumes, cleaning supplies, dust, dust mites, and smoke from cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and vapes. Allergens may include pollen, pet hair, pests like cockroaches and rodents, as well as foods people may be allergic to. Respiratory infections or illness and extreme levels of emotional stress or excitement can also trigger asthma attacks.

In the United States, 1 out of 12 people have asthma. It is the leading chronic childhood disease in America, affecting 4.9 million children under the age of 18. More than 23 million adults in the US are diagnosed with asthma, and women are 4.2% more likely to have asthma than men. Native Americans and Black Americans are more likely to have asthma than other ethnic groups.

There is no cure for asthma, but it can be managed. The first defense is being aware of personal allergens and triggers. Individuals should avoid irritants by keeping their home and work environments clean. It is also important to take medicine as prescribed when flare-ups occur. Those medications can be oral, inhalers, etc. Being informed about asthma and how to prevent attacks can help individuals stay prepared and manage asthma more effectively.



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## Free Your Fridge from Mold

Written by Charles Odilichukwu R. Okpala, Richmond County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent

Did you know that mold can grow in your fridge? Mold growth can happen due to high moisture levels and the darkness it creates when closed. Mold spores can come from contaminated food, spills, rotting items, and even air circulation. When you open the refrigerator door frequently, you may be facilitating condensation and allowing moisture to accumulate inside. Blocked vents and an overloaded fridge can further prevent air from circulating, which can create stagnant, humid air pockets. Common areas for mold can include the rubber door seal, crisper drawers, and inside the walls and shelves of the fridge.

There are several ways to remove mold from the fridge. A quick one is to spray undiluted white vinegar directly onto all the affected areas. Allow it to sit for at least an hour to effectively kill the spores, then scrub with a soft brush and wipe the affected surface clean. If you find stubborn moldy spots, use a paste of baking soda and water or 3% hydrogen peroxide to remove them. Make sure to remove all drawers and shelves from the fridge and clean them in the kitchen sink. A scrubby sponge can be very helpful to scrub out the crevices. Make sure to wipe everything down with hot water and a cloth, then dry completely with a clean towel.

Maintaining a mold-free fridge is very possible with a consistent and proactive routine centered on humidity control, cleanliness, and organization. Wipe up spills immediately, use airtight containers, inspect weekly for spoiled food, and place baking soda inside to absorb moisture. Store leftovers and ingredients in airtight, preferably glass, containers to prevent moisture escape, which will attract mold. Remove all leafy tops from root vegetables before storing; otherwise, they will draw moisture, cause spoilage, and attract mold. Keep your fridge organized using plastic bags to group similar items, so it is easy to pull them out for cleaning. Try not to overpack/overload the fridge to ensure proper airflow, which prevents cold air circulating and causes warm moldy spots.

## Healthy Home Hacks

~ Diane Bales ~

**Create fire starters** by filling empty toilet paper rolls with dryer lint.

**Use a lint roller** to clean dirty lampshades.

**Clean your dish brush or sponge** by washing it in the dishwasher with your other dishes.



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([healthyhomes.uga.edu](http://healthyhomes.uga.edu))



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