

**Learning Curve** is a monthly feature that focuses on education and student life. Next month's issue comes out on May 12.

# Dalhousie study to help clear the air

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for Metro Canada



Breathing indoors could be making you sick, but a new study by Dalhousie University's Atlantic RURAL Centre is looking for ways to clear the air.

Mark Gibson, a research assistant at the centre, says the \$465,000 study for Health Canada will examine what we're breathing, from vaporized chemicals from paint and furniture to particles generated by heating and cooking appliances.

"It's a common miscon-

ception that your indoor air is cleaner than the outside," Gibson says. "Generally (it's) not."

The data from the Halifax study will be compared to findings from across the country to get a baseline for indoor air quality. That will allow Health Canada to compare it to the guidelines to see if they need to be changed.

Gibson says our desire to save the Earth may be harming our lungs.

"We're told to tighten our homes to save energy ... and that's fine, but what you're doing is trapping the indoor air pollutants

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inside," he explains. "A lot of older homes in Nova Scotia ... are a bit leaky, so the natural ventilation around door jams and the like cleans out the indoor air pollution."

Newer homes also have problems with "volatile organic compounds" from construction materials like pressed wood. They use glues that can off-gas harmful chemicals.

Gibson has some tips to

improve your air. Check your wood stove or heating appliance to ensure the extraction system is clean and working well.

"I've seen wood stoves where the baffle isn't working and every time you open the door, smoke comes pouring out," he says. Adding a bathroom-style extraction fan to a damp room can dry it out, improving air quality.

That's the cheap and

easy option.

"The Ferrari solution is to get the mechanical heat recovery ventilation system." Most modern homes have this "forced air" system that recycles and cleans your air, but at about \$30,000, it isn't cheap.

"For most people in older homes, it's probably too much money," he says, which is why he's studying

economical filters next winter. "It could be that if you can't afford the Ferrari version, here's the moped version."

But the easiest way to improve the air is to clean.

"Dust absorbs all of the chemicals that are off-gassed and any air pollutants from outside. It then re-released those chemicals."

Use a good vacuum, or an anti-static pad for hardwood floors, to reduce that danger.

**A good vacuum can help to get rid of dust, keeping your indoor air clean.**

