

Air quality questionnaire

—How much do you know about the air quality in your house? Backed up sewers, overcooked chicken livers, paint fumes, the cat's litter box: these are the usual things we think of when we contemplate inside air quality.

But it's more complicated than that. Try this short quiz and discover how much you know about air quality. You'll find the answer at the end.

1. Today, we have to be more concerned about inside air contamination than we did 40 years ago. True or False.

2. The ban on urea formaldehyde foam insulation (UFFI) in the 1970s eliminated one of the most harmful chemicals inside the house—formaldehyde. True or False.

3. Regular vacuuming removes most pollutants in a house. True or False.

4. Exposure to low levels of contaminated air is not hazardous. True or False.

5. Opening windows will clean out the stale air. True or False.

Answers

1. **True.** The problem of air contamination in houses is a modern problem. The air our grandparents breathed was relatively free from the chemical vapours and fumes that now hover over modern cities. More than 60,000 chemicals are used commercially today that had not been invented 40 years ago.

2. **False.** Although most people associate formaldehyde with UFFI, it is also found in glues that are used in furniture, cupboards, carpeting, particle board, plywood and wood preservatives.

3. **False.** Indoor air is contaminated by many things that cannot be removed with the vacuum. Furnace humidifiers, for example, can hold pools of stagnant water that breed bacteria. Air flowing past these pools picks up the bacteria and carries it throughout the house. Synthetic materials often discharge chemicals. Homeowners susceptible to allergies may have problems with new drapes, floor coverings and furnishings.

4. **False.** One of the hazards of contaminated air is that it can affect health without our even realizing it. Although even brief exposure to concentrated air pollution is obviously harmful, what is not so obvious are the hazards of long-term exposure to low levels of polluted air.

5. **True.** But during the winter, it will also clean out your budget for heating fuels. And it won't help if you catch a cold.

The best way of improving air quality is by following a five-step plan.

•Reduce or eliminate the source of contamination. Store household chemicals and paint outside, if possible, and dispose of unneeded chemical containers.

You might consider painting particle board with low-permeability paint. This will prevent formaldehyde gas—discharged from the glue that bonds the particles—from escaping.

Let firewood dry outside. Wet wood releases a lot of moisture into the air.

•Install a central exhaust system or individual fans at or near sources of contamination. In some cases, it is impractical to eliminate the sources of contamination, such as laundry detergent and bleach. Washrooms, laundry rooms, kitchens and cabinets that store chemical products are ideal places for fans.

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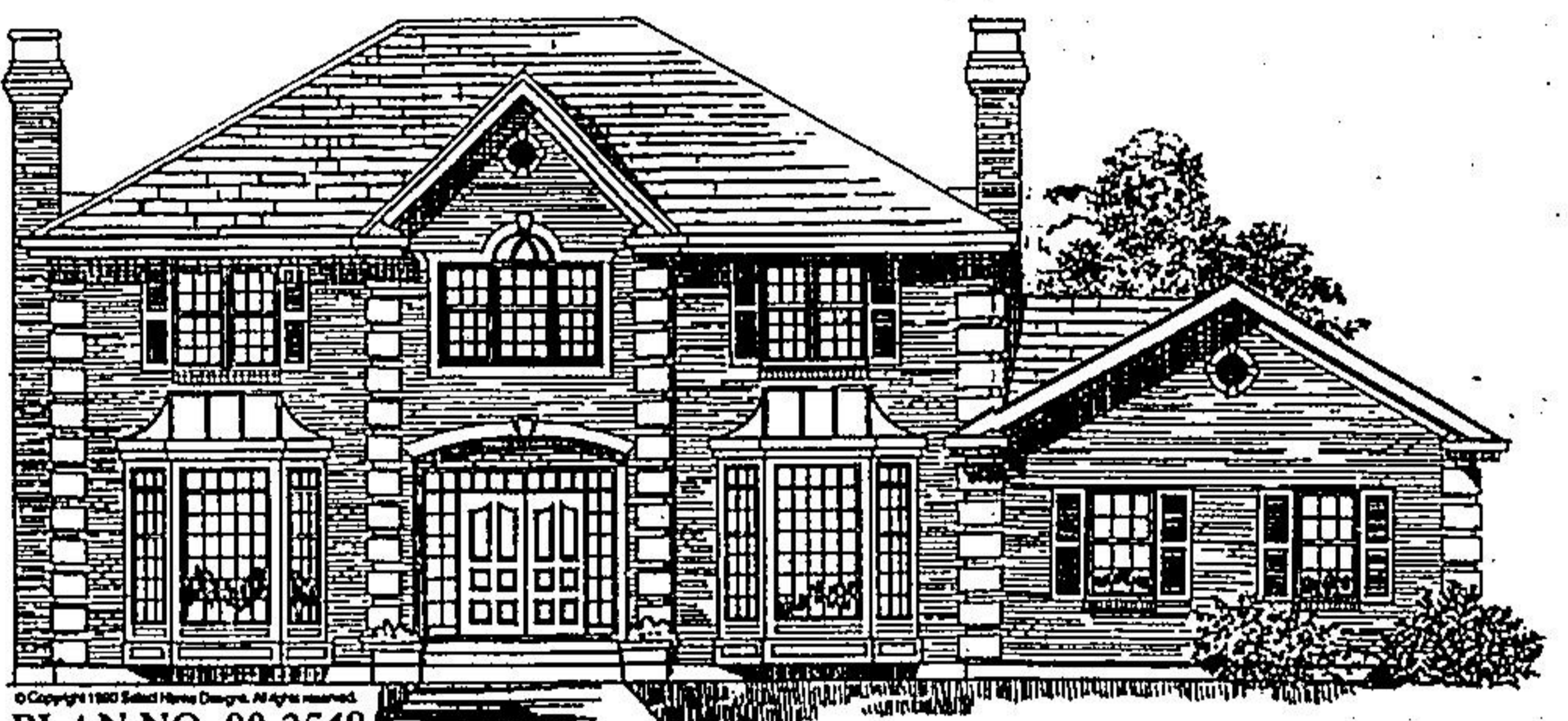
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