

Natural Fibre Mattress Info

Why Your Mattress May Be Killing You

by Mark Sweiger

The natural movement, which started with organic food, is moving to the bedroom in a big way. "The bedroom?" you say. Yes, my dear, the bedroom, where natural fibre mattresses and natural fibre bedding are becoming an important new trend in the quest for a healthier lifestyle.

The natural bedroom trend is motivated by some very recent disturbing discoveries about the petroleum-based foam mattresses most of us sleep on every night. Studies of household dust have confirmed that your mattress is likely one of the most significant sources of cancer-causing chemicals in your home. The average mattress consists of petroleum-based foam covered in petroleum-based polyester fabric. During its 10-year average lifetime, a foam mattress loses up to half its weight, and the lost weight goes on your bedroom floor in the form of toxic dust and in the air in the form of formaldehyde gas which is a by-product of the foam breakdown. Those dust bunnies under your bed could be a real threat to your health, unless you use an organic mattress which does not break down into these toxic by-products.

The foam mattress story gets even more scary. The average petroleum-based foam queen-sized mattress is soaked in about a pound of fire retardant chemicals called PDBEs, which have already been banned in Europe, but not in North America. PDBEs are chemicals which are similar to the banned PCBs, and they build up in the body like DDT and PCBs. The PDBEs are used because they are the simplest and cheapest way to conform to United States mattress fire resistance codes. They are also promoted by the chemical industry, which recently sponsored tightening of the mattress fire resistance codes, which will cause even greater quantities of PDBEs to be used in the manufacture of mattresses beginning in 2006. While these new codes will save an estimated 27 lives a year from fires, these new regulations play Russian roulette with the future health of the 285 million Americans that sleep on these petroleum-based foam mattresses. Those calling for a ban on PDBEs say the greater danger is not the lives lost in fires, but the potentially millions of cases of cancer caused by exposure to these chemicals over the coming decades.

The solution to this problem is to remove petroleum-based bedding from your home, and this has spawned the burgeoning natural bedroom movement. The cornerstone of this trend is the natural fibre mattress, which is the same kind of mattresses our ancestors used before the rise of the petrochemical industry after World War II. It is also interesting to note that current cancer rates are more than 5 times higher than before World War II, when everybody was sleeping on natural fibre mattresses by definition, because there was no petrochemical industry during those times.

Examples of a natural mattress include:

1. Cotton and wool batting innerspring mattresses with a cotton fabric cover. Wool is naturally fire retardant and meets all US fire codes.
2. A Natural latex mattress, whose foam is made from the latex sap of the rubber tree and which require no fire retardants because natural rubber does not burn well.
3. Luxury natural fibre mattresses which use combination of all three materials, cotton, wool, and latex, to produce maximum comfort mattresses that rival any non-natural mattresses.
4. All cotton mattresses. Although cotton does not burn well, it requires a doctor's prescription because cotton does not meet US fire resistance codes.

Natural fibre mattresses also have comfort advantages over traditional petroleum-based foam mattresses. They wick away moisture from the body much more thoroughly than clammy polyester and man-made foam, stopping night sweating and cutting down on problems like athlete's foot and jock itch. Wool also regulates body temperature very well, which is important for a restful sleep. Natural latex foam and wool are resistant to dust mites, which cause allergies in many people, and cotton and latex are both hypoallergenic materials. Natural fibre mattresses are also considered a must for people with chemical sensitivities.

About the author: Mark Sweiger is a freelance reporter on home and garden topics and ecological news