

# IAQ by Gord Cooke

## Something's in the Air



If you were to ask, and you should ask every client: "What types of air pollutants have you heard about that may be affecting the quality of air your family breathes in your home?" many people would be able to recall hearing about dust and pollens and maybe bacteria or viruses. Of course, cigarette smoke, animal dander and perhaps mold would also be top of mind for those who live with smokers, pets or moisture problems. In the indoor air quality world, we often categorize the dozens of potential pollutants into two categories:

#1 Biological pollutants: those from living organisms – molds and their by-products, pollen, dander, dust mites, bio-effluents, viruses and bacteria

#2 Chemical contaminants: smoke, off-gassing from carpets, furniture, paint, cleaners, personal hygiene products, cooking odours.

Unfortunately, consumers and many contractors only think of one or two strategies to control or reduce these potentially harmful pollutants. Too often, filtration systems of various types are the only solution thought of. I've known consumers who have tried half a dozen of the latest, greatest filtration technologies presented to them to try. While filters can be useful in reducing some airborne pollen and dust, most of the pollutants in our homes are better controlled by higher level strategies such as ventilation to dilute chemical contaminants and control moisture levels or better yet simply removing the source of pollutants. In short, the most helpful HVAC contractor is the one who is able to find the right solution for the specific air quality problem a client has. In all cases, ventilation will be at least part of the solution. All houses, new or old, tight or loose, need capacity for mechanical ventilation.

**Gord Cooke**  
Special Contributor