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Avoid Toxins in Your Home

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We're exposed to many toxins in our day-to-day lives, even as we sleep. Conventional polyurethane foams used in mattresses and cushioned furnishings release health hazardous toxins into our indoor air throughout the day and all through the night. Given how much time we spend in close contact to these foam items, you may want to consider upgrading to natural foam alternatives.

Our guide will give you all the basics you need to make healthier eco home furniture choices.

Quick Facts: Hazards Are Closer Than You Think

- **35 million tons of oil in foams and plastics:** Polyurethane foam used to make mattresses and cushions is petroleum by products: toluene diisocyanate (TDI) and petroleum derived polyols.^[i] The petrochemical industry has a yearly output of 700 million tons worldwide^[ii] of which 5% is used to make plastics.^[iii]
- **Tumor-causing flame retardant treatments:** Polyurethane foam burns fast and hot,^[iv] which is why it's treated with flame retardants like polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), Melamine,^[v] chlorinated tris (TDCPP) and chlorinated organophosphate flame retardants (OPFRs).^[vi] TDCPP negatively impacts fertility and tumor growth rates kidneys^[vii] of which 8,000 tons are used every year.^[viii] High-level exposure to melamine causes acute renal failure, urinary stone formation, and crystalluria.^[ix]
- **Toxic offgassing of foams in your home:** Polyurethane foams release volatile organic compounds (VOCs), contributing to indoor air pollution^[x] and causing liver damage, nausea, asthma, throat irritation, allergic reactions, fatigue, and a host of other health issues.^[xi]
- **90% of foams tossed, not recycled:** The presence of chlorofluorocarbon gases (responsible for ozone layer destruction) makes polyurethane foams unrecyclable. Of the estimated 1.5 million tons of polyurethane foam thrown away per year, 90% is landfilled or burned, releasing dangerous hydrogen cyanide, nitrogen oxides, and benzonitril.^[xii]



Quick Guide: Alternative Fills & Foams

1. **Natural rubber foam:** Made from the sap of the rubber tree, Hevea Brasiliensis (common in tropical climates), natural rubber foam is naturally resistant to dustmites and mold (so no chemical treatments required), can be easily recycled, and lasts more than 30 years without losing its shape. You can get a natural rubber foam mattress and furniture from brands like [Essentia](#) and [Good Night Naturals](#).
2. **Plant-based fills: Kapok:** A very light material (lighter than cotton), kapok is as soft as down and perfect for mattresses and pillows. It grows on trees in Southern rainforests in Mexico and Asia and is harvested from the tree's fruit so no deforestation is required. Kapok fiber is non-allergenic, naturally resists mold and mildew, and is free from harmful chemicals. Buy Kapok-filled mattresses and pillows through [A Happy Planet](#) and [Satara Home](#).
3. **Plant-based fills: Tencel:** A brand from the Lenzing Fibers of Austria, Tencel can be used on carpets, blankets, a memory foam mattress topper, and pillows. It is a product of the wood pulp cellulose from trees that grow on land that is unfit for food crops or grazing. While the solvent used for production of Tencel is somewhat toxic substance, 99% of it is recycled. Brands such as [Pure Nature](#) and [Forty Winks](#) sell Tencel-filled furnishings.
4. **Plant-based fills: Ingeo:** Derived naturally from corn and made using low-impact processes, Ingeo is found in comforters, mattress toppers, and pillows. It is naturally flame-retardant and is also 100% made in the USA. Ingeo is sold under the [Natural Living](#) brand.
5. **Cruelty-free down and feathers fills:** Down and feather from various types of birds may be a more eco-friendly solution than poly-foam, but it is likely not cruelty-free. Check out our guide to [humane feather fashion](#) to find out how to buy eco home fashion without the animal pain.
6. **Cruelty-free wool fills:** Wool is naturally flame retardant and resistant to insects and mold, making it a perfect eco-alternative to foam. Conventional wool, however, comes at the cost of painful practices in the sheep industry, such as mulesing and shearing. Our guide to [cruelty-free wool](#) will guide you to humane options, or check out brands like US-made [Eco wool](#), [Pure Rest](#), and [Shepherd's Dream](#).
7. **Government actions to ban flame retardants in polyurethane foams:** Be part of the movement to compel manufacturers of things like memory foam mattress to find safer chemicals or natural alternatives to toxic flame retardants by supporting the [Interstate Chemicals Clearinghouse \(IC2\)](#), a collective effort to regulate the use of chemicals in consumer products.

Keep Digging: Polyurethane Foam Dangers

- See the [Sustainable Furnishings](#) for a list of different foam types used in cushions.
- Refer to this report by the [US Environmental Protection Agency](#) for a complete list of flame-retardant chemicals currently

used in polyurethane foams.

- Find out about the recycling process for polyurethane foams from the [American Chemistry Council](#).

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