Freeing houses of toxic materials

(AP) — Linda Remington's life was shattered after a car explosion sear her lungs, but creating special living conditions for herself led to a new career.

After the 1974 accident, Remington spent months in inhalation therapy and still battles chronic asthma, caused by the explosion.

She discovered that building materials used in her work as an industrial designer aggravated her problems. Work environments became intolerable, and she started collecting disability payments.

Remington, 41, was sensitive to gases and toxins from common construction materials such as plywood, paint, fabrics, caulk and adhesives. Even a passing smoker caused serious breathing problems.

Then she discovered an opportunity. Five years ago, she built a house near Benzie County's Lake Ann that was free of indoor pollution and toxins.

"People started calling, others who were chemically sensitive."

REMINGTON TOOK architectural design courses at Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City and worked in the field until she earned a builder's license.

Eventually she launched Hem-Eco Corp., a consulting and remodeling company for people who want environmentally safe house and building improvements.

Some of her customers are referrals from doctors who prescribe house detoxification for their patients.

"It's something the medical profession is just starting to become aware of. Many people may not be aware of their sensitivity. They start having minor symptoms — itching eyes, chronic flu symptoms, headaches — and they go from doctor to doctor and sometimes get misdiagnosed as hypochondriacs."

DETOXIFYING A building could involve switching cleaning materials, replacing wallpaper, stripping paint, cleaning heating systems and improving air exchange.

"It's far better to go in and build a safe home in the first place than to try and clean up one that has become contaminated."

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