

# Is Your Pet a Toxic Dumping Ground?

You work hard to reduce your family's exposure to household toxins, but your pets may face a greater risk than you, says Olga Naidenko, PhD, senior scientist at the Environmental Working Group, "Where do our pets spend their time? They sleep on the couch, roll around on the carpet, and get dust carrying toxic chemicals all over their fur and then lick it off."

Relative to humans, dogs are burdened with three times more perfluorochemicals (PFCs)—the chemicals used to stain-proof furniture and sometimes coat the inside of pet-food bags and cans. Our canine companions also face two and half times the amount of human exposure to polybrominated diphenyl ether flame retardants (PBDEs), which are used on furniture and carpet. And our kitties absorb a whopping 23 times more PBDEs than we do, which they store in fatty tissue. Studies have linked PBDEs to thyroid and liver problems as well as cancer.

While PBDEs and PFCs have been banned in many parts of Europe, they are still widely used in North America. But Naidenko says she has hope. "Now that we have this information, we can work toward manufacturing reform and better regulation." In the meantime, here are some ways to lighten your pet's toxic load:

- Choose pet food without the chemical preservatives BHA, BHT, and ethoxyquin, and opt for organic or free-range ingredients to ensure pets are getting high-quality food.
- Do not use chemical based shampoo and skin treatment products. Find natural, safe alternatives. Avoid use flea collars; find other alternatives such as citronella essential oil or products containing neem oil.
- Avoid typical chemical based household cleaning products. These increase the level of indoor pollution. Because they are made from petroleum, they do not bio-degrade and thus these chemicals often Hoover low to the ground where your pet resides.
- When you buy new furniture, resist adding stain-proofing treatments.
- Replace furniture or pet bedding whose exposed or crumbling foam may have been treated with flame retardants.
- Vacuum often, preferably using a HEPA filter. Since PFCs and PDBEs migrate through dust particles, keeping your carpets and furniture dust-free will help reduce contamination.