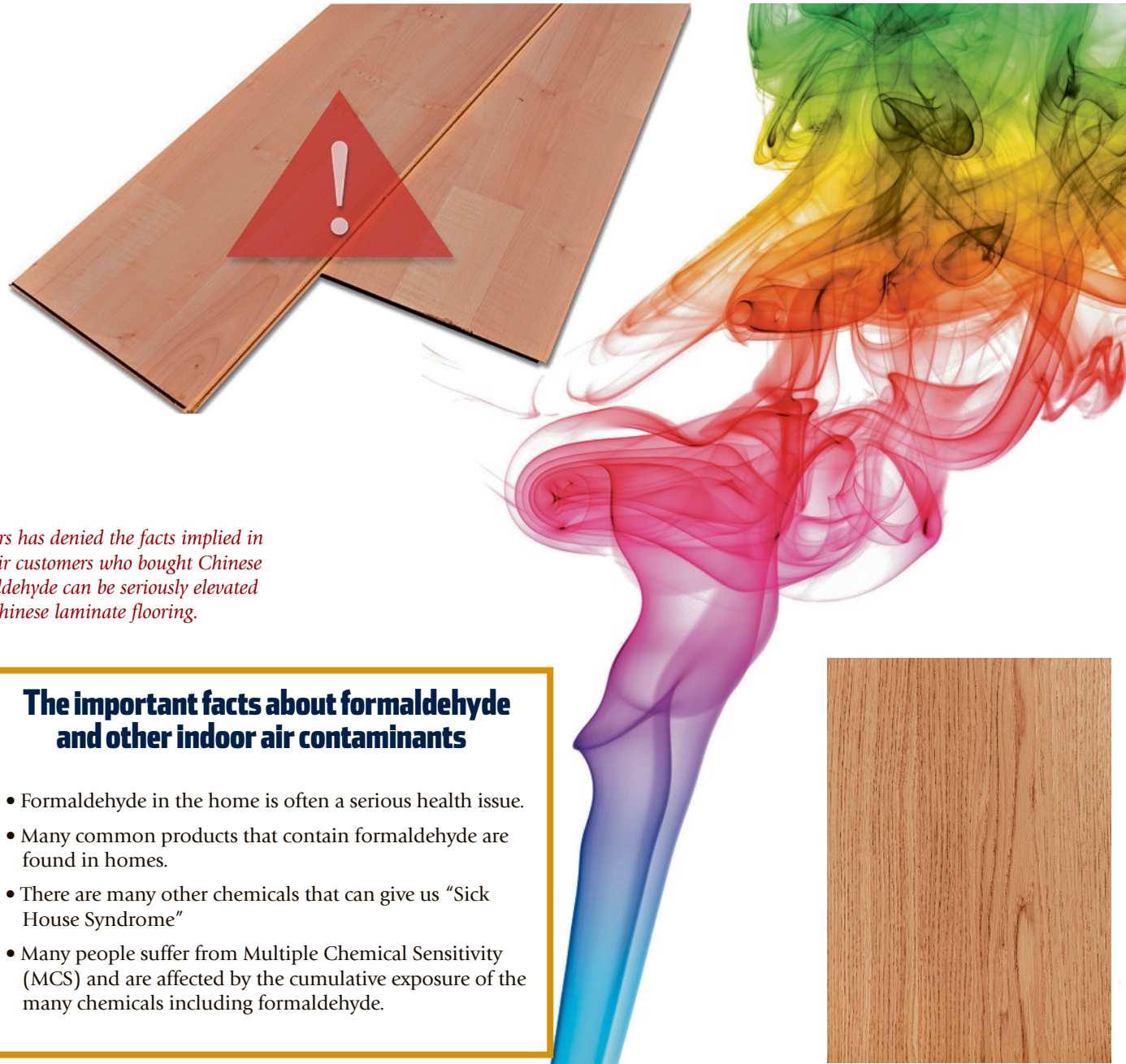


# '60 Minutes' airs out formaldehyde problems in investigative segment

By Dan Howard  
for TRIB TOTAL MEDIA



For decades, the sentence "Hi, I'm from '60 Minutes'" has struck terror into many business persons. Lumber Liquidators has recently had that experience and true to history, it was a very bad day for them.

The '60 Minutes' story was that the potentially toxic gas formaldehyde was found to be off gassing from some of the laminate flooring the company was selling. The labs used by '60 Minutes' were quoted as finding levels as high as 20 times the permissible level in homes with laminate flooring material coming from China.

*Before going further, you should know that Lumber Liquidators has denied the facts implied in the news piece and has offered free formaldehyde testing to their customers who bought Chinese laminate flooring. The real story behind the story is that formaldehyde can be seriously elevated in many building materials and household products, not just Chinese laminate flooring.*

Other products that can have dangerous levels of formaldehyde include plywood, furniture, plug in fragrances, candles, cabinets, carpets, detergents, deodorants, plastics, paints and a host of other household materials.

This is not the first time that formaldehyde has been a national story. Hundreds of trailers built as temporary housing for the victims of Hurricane Katrina were uninhabitable because of formaldehyde. Another example is UFFI (Urea Formaldehyde Foam Insulation). This was an insulation installed primarily in wall cavities during the 1970s. That insulation made countless people ill and rendered many homes uninhabitable with formaldehyde.

## The important facts about formaldehyde and other indoor air contaminants

- Formaldehyde in the home is often a serious health issue.
- Many common products that contain formaldehyde are found in homes.
- There are many other chemicals that can give us "Sick House Syndrome"
- Many people suffer from Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and are affected by the cumulative exposure of the many chemicals including formaldehyde.

## Symptoms of formaldehyde exposure

The EPA lists many respiratory problems as symptoms of formaldehyde exposure. These include lung, eye, nose and throat irritation. They also consider formaldehyde as a probable carcinogen. According to the CDC Toxic Substance Registry, exposed individuals can experience headaches, bronchitis and pneumonia. Sensitive individuals may experience asthma and dermatitis.

## Types of testing if you suspect formaldehyde or other indoor air contaminant

**Air testing** is conducted by drawing approximately 15 liters of air through a glass tube filled with a sorbent material using a specialized low volume air pump. This is an accurate method to determine exposure. The limits of this test is that exposure increases with higher temperature and humidity. The test results need interpreted with consideration of those factors. Cost of this type of testing is usually about \$300.00 to \$400.00 per test.

**Bulk testing** consists of submitting a piece of the material to a certified lab. One limitation of this method is that the tested piece of material can vary from other pieces of the same material in the home and not give a good overall picture of the contamination. The other limit is that we are affected by the sum of all exposures, and sampling a single piece of one material does not tell us if there are other materials or furnishings in the home adding to the total exposure. The advantage of bulk testing is if we are trying to determine if an individual product such as flooring needs to be removed from the home, we get that answer. This type of test may also be needed to enter a class action suit or other legal action. Cost of this type of testing is usually about \$500.00 to \$600.00 per test.

**Badges** These are typically used in industrial settings to monitor workplace exposure for OSHA compliance. These are simple to use and do not require any specialized equipment. These would be a low cost screening method. The badges absorb formaldehyde as easily in the home as in the workplace. The badges are then sent to a lab for interpretation. These tests are usually done in pairs and cost for this type of testing is usually between \$100.00 to \$175.00 for each test.

## The health impact of formaldehyde can vary from Person to Person

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) The impact on individuals varies based on both the time and duration of exposure. A small but constant exposure over an extended time or a large exposure in a short time can have equal effects.

They also suggest that exposure to multiple chemicals can intensify reactions. An individual's general health, age, sex, genetics, lifestyle, and diet are also factors that can affect the level that is toxic to an individual. An example of the wide variation in reactions that people can have to any environmental factor is that some children can have life threatening reactions to peanuts, but most children could live on peanut butter.

## How long does formaldehyde stay in a home

The Healthy Home Institute provides a very important explanation about off gassing rates of formaldehyde. They calculate that in most cases one half of the gas leaves the material in 3 to 5 years. At the 3 year "half life", the amount that would dissipate into a homes air would be 1/2 of the original rate at 3 years. At 6 years the rate would be 1/4 of the original amount of formaldehyde in the air.

## General recommendations if you suspect high formaldehyde levels

- Test for the level in the house to determine if it is actually a problem.
- Identify which materials are contaminated and remove them from the home.
- Decrease humidity and temperature in the home. This reduces the rate that the toxic gas leaves materials.
- Add ventilation to the home. Outdoor fresh air reduces

the level in a home. Environmental professionals have the expression: "The solution to pollution is dilution" Opening windows or adding specialized outdoor air infusion equipment in the HVAC system can help.

## Last words if you suspect indoor air or sick house problems

It is important to hire a professional to conduct the inspection that is experienced and qualified to perform this important task. Be sure to also verify that samples that are taken are to be analyzed by an accredited independent laboratory.

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You will find links and additional information about formaldehyde in the online copy of this article at: [www.EnviroSpect.info/formaldehyde](http://www.EnviroSpect.info/formaldehyde)



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