

State offers consumers little help

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About half of the states have created indoor air programs, or have staff in public health departments who regularly answer questions about indoor problems.

Georgia offers very little help.

Twenty-four states have developed occupational safety and health programs to extend federal workplace safety coverage to local and state government employees.

Georgia isn't among them.

Home builders are licensed in all Southeastern states except one: Georgia.

By these and other measures, Georgia lags in protecting consumers from indoor air quality problems.

Georgia consumers who call the state public health department with questions about indoor air problems are funneled to a lone employee.

County health departments in Georgia may answer questions and provide information about indoor pollutants, but few inspect homes, businesses and schools for mold and other contamination.

For Georgians buying new houses, little information is available about contractors. Not only is there little oversight of Georgia builders, the state doesn't track complaints against residential contractors.

That's important to indoor air quality because many construction defects are associated with water intrusion -- the first step toward developing a mold problem.

More than 90 percent of construction defects in new houses are associated with water, said Charlie Peebles, a Norcross attorney who represents homeowners in disputes with builders.

"Licensing gives some enforcement mechanism to control a general contractor's quality of work," Peebles said. "If you can strap a hammer on your belt, you can be a builder in this state. In other states, there is licensing and penalties. With enough complaints, their license gets yanked."

Meanwhile, building code inspections in Georgia don't necessarily guarantee healthy houses.

Overworked inspectors may do drive-by inspections. More than 60 rural counties don't enforce minimum construction standards at all.

Georgia trails in other indoor air protections:

- Several states, but not Georgia, have passed or considered bans on smoking in restaurants and bars.
- Pesticide use in or near schools is regulated in 33 states. Georgia requires posting notification of pesticide applications and restricts use to times when children aren't present.

Compared with laws in other states, Georgia's requirements are weak, says Kagan Owens of the Washington-based environmental group Beyond Pesticides. **Find this article at:**
<http://www.ajc.com/business/content/business/0703/20airstate.html>

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