

Bird Safety Corner

Drywall

Drywall is a panel used to create interior walls and ceilings inside buildings. Also known as plasterboard, gypsum board, and wallboard, drywall is made of gypsum plaster pressed between two sheets of paper or fiberglass. Drywall is susceptible to mold when it becomes wet, and mold growth isn't always apparent because the drywall is covered usually with paint or wallpaper. Drywall was made with lead prior to 1970. While newer drywall doesn't contain lead, concerns were raised in the late 2000's over drywall imported from China which emitted volatile sulfur compounds including hydrogen sulfide. Levels were so high that pipes and wires corroded! These problems were worse in the hot, humid south. Unfortunately drywall made in the U.S. has also been recently found to emit high levels of volatile sulfur compounds, so just knowing country of origin doesn't guarantee safety.



So, why is this of concern to your birds? Well obviously when you do construction in your house and replace drywall, exposing the old drywall is hazardous because the particles from the old board will get all over the place if you're not careful. Cutting the new board to fit will also spread particles around, and new board may off-gas volatile compounds. Your birds should be away from all such construction activity, and these areas should be thoroughly cleaned before birds are placed there. You will need to research your new boards to see if they have the potential to off-gas sulfur compounds. If the boards are completely plastered over, that may seal in the sulfur compounds, but in general, birds should NOT be placed anywhere around such contaminated boards since off-gassing can continue for months and even years.



Construction isn't the only time drywall is hazardous to your birds, however. If your birds are like mine, they like to chew on anything and everything they can get their little beaks on. If your house is older than 1970, and your bird chews on the walls, it may be ingesting lead. If you have had water damage in your home, mold may be growing behind drywall, so be alert to drywall damage. Drywall is an often overlooked source of toxicity for birds, but can be just as much of a problem as paint and carpet.

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