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University Outreach and Extension serves Missouri by extending research-based knowledge and high-quality educational programs to address the high-priority needs of citizens at the local level.

Beware of arsenic danger in wooden play structures

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Winter is the perfect time to make plans to build a new deck or play structure, or to refurbish existing structures to enjoy this spring. However, consumers should be aware of potential risks in some widely used wood products treated with a chemical preservative containing arsenic.

Testing by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found that leaching of arsenic occurs from pressure-treated wood using chromated copper arsenate (CCA). As a result, the EPA has announced it will not allow CCA-treated wood to be available for any residential uses as of January 2004.

Of the variety of wood materials available, pressure-treated wood has been the most popular choice for years because it is inexpensive and resistant to decay. Play structures using CCA-treated wood had

generally been considered safe for use by children since the arsenic leaching from the wood was predicted to be minimal. Recent tests found that if not properly sealed, both the surfaces of the wooden play structures and the soil around the play structures may have significant amounts of arsenic.

Arsenic is a poison that is a known human carcinogen, which means it is known to cause cancer. Builders and others who regularly work with CCA-treated wood have been warned for years to wear gloves and masks that prevent inhalation of dust from sawing, but families with children were not told of potential risks because it was not believed to be a danger until now.

Burning scrap CCA-treated lumber is known to be dangerous. Arsenic can enter the body when breathing or swallowing arsenic-laden dust, or getting arsenic on your skin. Arsenic is easily taken up onto hands from simple contact with the wood surface.

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Breaking free of exercise barriers

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Most of us recognize that being physically active is one of the best things we can do for our health and well-being. Unfortunately, there always seem to be barriers that keep us from getting started or maintaining our good intentions regarding fitness. The tips below give some ideas for breaking free and overcoming excuses.

“I’m too old and out of shape to start exercising.”

Not true! Regardless of age, everyone can find some way to be active. The key is to start slowly, build gradually and stay with it. Avoid doing too much, too soon, which can result in sore muscles. After a few weeks, the psychological boost from being active will set in and you’ll be hooked.



“At my size, I’m so self-conscious.”

Being self-conscious is an emotion most adults feel when venturing into unknown territory. Invite a friend to walk with you. The conversation will help distract you. Check into videos specifically designed for large women, then “move” in the privacy of your own home. Visit local fitness centers to see if they offer classes for large women and men. Read *Great Shape: The First Fitness Guide for Large Women* by Pat Lyons & Debby Burgard. Discover how people of any size can move and get fit.



“I’m too busy to exercise.”

Making time for activity breaks can actually help productivity. You’ll think more clearly and be energized. We all have the same amount of time. It’s up to each of us to determine how we use it. Make exercise a priority. Take care of your health, and feel great!



“I’m too tired after work to exercise.”

Many people think exercise will be tiring when actually the opposite is true. A brisk walk after work can be invigorating. Take 20 minutes to do some physical activity to relieve stress and recharge. People who are active have more pep and tend to sleep better too.



“I have favorite TV programs I watch each night.”

Watch TV while lifting weights, riding a stationary bike, or doing some stretches. During commercials, get up and climb stairs, or walk. Schedule a short walk prior to and after your TV program. You could easily tally up 30 minutes of activity if you plan.



“I often have the ‘blues’ and don’t feel like I want to do anything.”

Stress, worry and depression can get us down, but studies indicate that exercise helps to relieve these feelings. With movement, the body releases endorphins, natural opiate-like substances that help you relax and feel happy. Exercise can truly lift your spirits. This is one of the most valuable benefits of increasing physical activity.



“I have arthritis and will hurt if I exercise.”

Actually, having arthritis is an important reason to move, especially in the morning when stiffness is likely to be worst. A morning warm-up with gentle stretches helps alleviate stiffness in joints. Exercise works to soothe or “grease” painful joints with a natural lubricant known as the synovial fluid. Strengthening muscles that support joints helps to protect them so they work better.

Decide now what you can do to increase your activity. Make 2003 the year to get up and get moving!

I've been thinking...



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This past summer I spent time with teens that were in trouble with the law. Most of them were not seasoned criminals, though some were clearly headed that direction. Most were kids merely reacting to life circumstances rather than thinking through situations and consequences.

I've been thinking a lot about thinking lately. I hope I don't offend too many with my conclusion that, as a whole, we just aren't very good at it. Our brains tend to operate on "automatic" a great deal of the time, relying on habit to get us through the day.

Habit isn't always bad. In fact, it makes our lives a bit easier. Personally, I do not want to get up each day and think about which cereal bowl to use for breakfast or whether to feed the dogs before I get ready for work. Frankly, trying to dress myself each morning is hard enough.

The problem with habits, though, is that they can become *habit-forming*. Though routines simplify our lives, they create the danger of lulling us into mediocrity. Decisions we make for our families and ourselves may too often rely on brain "autopilot,"

implying a dependency either upon the way we were taught as children or upon the way we've always done things.

Good decision-making is the result of critical thinking. It is based upon our ability to explore all facets of an issue before making a choice. The most understandable definition of critical thinking that I've found is: "thinking about our thinking in order to make it better."

When the above-mentioned teens were asked if they had critically considered possible consequences of the choices that placed them in institutional care, they all responded that they had not. Their conclusion was that they had either reacted to a situation (punched someone who made them angry; ran away from a group home they did not like) or followed the crowd (used cocaine; stole a car). They did not *think* through the likely results of their actions.

We live in a world where more and more people take less and less responsibility for their thoughts and actions. Newspaper headlines scream the news everyday. Our most trusted institutions have betrayed us. Where have we gone wrong?

Could it be that we are not thinking critically enough as individuals or as a nation? Do we accept everything we were taught as children to be dogma? Do we teach our children to do the same? Isn't it really much easier when they don't question or challenge us?

Critical thinking takes effort. The great critical thinkers have been refining their thought processes for years. As a result, their thinking not only impacts what happens in their own lives, but also in the world.

While we may never reach the Albert Einstein or Carl Sagan level of critical thinking, we can begin better decision-making by refusing to do things the same old way every time.



Here are a few brain-stimulating ideas:

Take a different route home from work today. Make a point of noticing a building, business or landmark that you have not "seen" before.

Read something in the paper you don't normally read. Form an opinion about it. Defend it. Now defend the other side.

Try whispering instead of yelling.

Make an effort to see your spouse's or your child's point of view on an issue of disagreement.

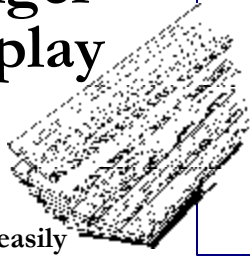
Eat with your opposite hand.

Breaking humdrum habits through brain exercises can only make us better thinkers.

If we get really good at it, we might even make the claim of the White Queen in Through The Looking Glass : "Sometimes," said the Queen, "I've believed six impossible things before breakfast."

Beware of arsenic danger in wooden play structures

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CCA-treated wood is easily identified by the greenish color that fades to gray with exposure. However, it is difficult to tell treated from untreated wood after it has aged and lost its green tint. For this reason, it is important for parents to be aware of the potential problem and to take precautions to ensure children's safety:

- **Keep children and pets out of the areas under deck and play structures where arsenic may have leached into the soil.** Do not let food come into contact with the wood surface.
- **Be sure children wash their hands carefully after playing on wooden play structures.**
- **Parents should contact schools, recreation departments and playground owners to ask if play structures are CCA-treated.** Advise them of this new concern and recommend proper sealing of surfaces to reduce arsenic leaching.

The industry has agreed to alert the public to the potential risks. Each piece of wood is now required to have an end-tag with the following information:

- Arsenic is in the pesticide used to treat the wood.
- The treated wood should not be burned.
- A dust mask and goggles should be worn when cutting the wood.
- Gloves should be worn when handling pressure-treated wood.
- Call a toll-free number for more information.

EPA has not concluded that CCA-treated wood poses unreasonable risks to the public for existing CCA-treated wood used around homes or from wood that remains available in stores. EPA does not believe there is any reason to remove or replace CCA-treated structures, including decks, playground equipment or the surrounding soils. Consumers can take the following actions to reduce risks associated with pressure-treated wooden structures:

- **Seal CCA-treated structures (decks, playscapes) every 2 years with a sealant such as an oil-based stain or water repellent.** According to the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory, this can reduce the leaching of arsenic dramatically. Sealing the wood also extends its life. These coatings need to be renewed every two years to be effective. Paints and varnish reduce arsenic leaching even more efficiently, but they have the disadvantage of cracking with time and requiring sanding, which can also release arsenic.
- **Consider using safer alternatives such as naturally decay-resistant woods like redwood or cedar.** Wood treated with ACQ (alkaline copper quaternary, also known as *copper quat*), is arsenic-free and appears to be less toxic. It is about 20 percent more expensive than CCA-treated wood, but appears to be as durable. "Decay resistant" does not mean maintenance free. Both types of wood need protection from ultraviolet light and water. Varieties of new wood composites are another alternative.

More information about CCA-treated wood can be found on the EPA website at <http://www.epa.gov>. For information on housing and home improvement projects, contact Rebecca Blocker or Sharon Laux, regional environmental design specialists (phone numbers below).

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