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Eagle's Eye on Housing: Improving Indoor Air Quality with Heat Recovery Ventilation Systems

We all know that bad indoor air due to mold and moisture build-up can cause health problems for home occupants. First Nations communities across the country are discovering that one effective way to help improve indoor air quality is a heat recovery ventilation system. HRV systems are not complicated to install and, with proper servicing and maintenance, can have a positive effect on home occupants, as one family in Conne River, Newfoundland can attest.

The community had a unit installed in the home last year, as part of a workshop led by Tex McLeod, a veteran trainer in the fields of indoor air quality, energy and housing. When he and Ken Taylor, head of CMHC's Aboriginal Capacity Development in Halifax, dropped in this year to see how the family was doing, they were impressed with the results. The husband, who suffers from asthma, no longer uses an inhaler. "Turns out everyone's health is doing better, the musty odours are gone, along with the condensation from the windows – plus, no more mold," says McLeod. He was also impressed with the creative designs the teenage daughter painted around the air grill, and wonders if the inspiration to paint her room came from the installation of the ventilation system.

"This is a great example of how ventilation installed well can make a big difference." Similar stories have been reported in other communities that have installed the systems. Now, says Ken Taylor, it's up to First Nations communities to invest in the systems, and provide education and training to both housing staff and home occupants on how to maintain them. CMHC now offers training workshops as part of its Housing Quality Matters series. The two-day session is designed for renovators, construction workers and maintenance staff, but the first day is open to non-technical people such as public-health nurses and environmental health officers. They may also return on the second day to see the system once it has been installed. (Other workshops are available to home occupants who want to improve their home maintenance knowledge and skills.)

For more information, contact your band office or local CMHC office. You can call 1 800-668-2642 or visit www.cmhc.ca to find the CMHC office nearest you.