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The "New Car Smell" Proven Not to Be Harmful

Just slightly allergic

You know the specific chemical plastic aroma emitted by any new car...These odors are regularly emitted from plastics, synthetic fabrics, upholstery, carpets, adhesives, paints, cleaning materials and other sources and are volatile organic chemicals. Only a small percentage of these volatile organic molecules are obvious; the rest are odorless. This smell makes us nervous but breathe easy: a new research at the Technical University of Munich in Germany discovered that the new car odor is apparently non-toxic, although it might increase allergies. The new investigation looked upon the health effects of volatile chemicals emitted by the cars on conditions similar to those when the cars are parked in hot sunshine. The German team first collected molecules from the air inside a new car and a three-year-old one of the same brand located under 14,000 watts of light, at temperatures reaching up to 150 degrees Fahrenheit (66 degrees Celsius). The emitted compounds were exposed to human, mouse and hamster cells. New car volatile chemicals did not inflict any toxic effect but air from the new car did trigger a slight immune activity in people with allergies, effect not observed in older cars. The same team investigates the "sick building syndrome," in which people seem to get sick after working in new buildings, which also emit a large amount of volatile organic chemicals. "If you had the concentration of volatile organic compounds in the air of new buildings that you had in new motor vehicles, you would immediately get sent home out of fear of sick building syndrome," said toxicologist Jeroen Buters of the research team. "This discrepancy might be explained in part by the different mindsets people have when it comes to entering new cars versus new buildings. There's a big discussion over whether sick building syndrome is real or not. We do know that in sick building syndrome, mindset is important. People are generally happier entering new cars than new workplaces. But another factor that might come into play is ventilation. If the smell is getting to you in the car, you can roll down your windows." he added. The team pointed out that car manufacturers are trying to reduce new car smell.