

# Searching for the Perfect Mattress

By Billy Stevens

Most Americans would love to live in a “green” home, free of harmful chemicals. But many aren’t sure where to start. Now there is a practical way to reduce most people’s longest daily exposure to chemical “off-gassing”—during sleep!

Night after night, we bury our faces in mattresses and pillows, breathing in whatever chemicals may be present. Chlorine-bleached covers can look lovely, and a fancy mattress top may feel like a cloud, but few realize what a toxic stew lurks just beneath that comfy surface.

Unbeknownst to most of us, conventional mattress making is a largely unregulated industry. Even the priciest brands contain chemicals that may have serious health effects, like formaldehyde, toluene, styrene, and butadiene; fire retardants including PDBEs (much in the news these days) and antimony; boric acid and other insecticides; and a variety of toxic glues. Many of these chemicals off-gas throughout the life of the mattress, causing headaches, allergic reactions, and sleepless nights.

Highly touted viscoelastic foam, also known as memory foam, is particularly egregious as it off-gasses formaldehyde, a carcinogen, for months after purchase. Additionally—like polyesters and most “foam rubbers”—its primary component is petroleum.

So, where does one find a truly healthy, chemical-free mattress? Organic cotton futons are one alternative, but they still contain fire retardants and are a haven for dust mites. High-tech airbeds are another popular option, but their design has been plagued by mold issues. Research suggests that the best natural sleep systems are built from latex, a sustainable extract of the rubber tree.

Latex foam is a product of air injection, forming a cushiony slab similar to the petroleum-based urethane “foam rubber” found in most mattresses. In



addition to offering the same pressure relieving and motion dampening qualities as viscoelastic foam, latex naturally repels dust mites. Unlike memory foam, latex does not retain the body’s impression—which can make it difficult to change sleep positions—nor does it feel hot, a common complaint.

But, not all latex is 100 percent natural and, as latex beds have become popular, all the big manufacturers are now making them. To cut costs, most use foam blended with synthetic latex, another petrochemical; only a few manufacturers use only the more expensive, all-natural foam. Even then, many companies encase their latex in synthetic fiberfills and polyester fabrics, effectively negating latex’s chemical-free advantage.

Only by covering the latex with an organic cover can a mattress be truly chemical-free, and only if a natural fire retardant is used. Fortunately, wool provides adequate fire protection, so a cover quilted with organic wool is the perfect solution. Wool offers the added benefit of wicking moisture from the body and retaining its loft over time, staying cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Unlike cotton and polyester fi-

bers, wool repels mites and protects the latex, which can last 30 years or more.

Where can you get such a healthy mattress? Fortunately, there’s one manufacturer with representatives right here in the Triangle—SavvyRest and their exclusive dealer, Green Dream Beds (formerly BilliBeds). The SavvyRest design is the ultimate in simplicity: three layers of 100 percent natural latex foam encased in an organic cotton and wool casing, stitched right here in North Carolina.

As a supremely satisfied customer myself, I started selling SavvyRest six years ago, confident that the Triangle is an ideal market for natural bedding. I’ve been gratified by the positive feedback from my customers, delighted with the comfort, customizability, workmanship, and longevity of their SavvyRest. Fortunately, SavvyRest mattresses are competitive with other high-end beds, making it possible to get a much healthier alternative at a comparable price.

At our new Green Dream Beds store we now have the full line of SavvyRest products on display, including eight examples of their latex and innerspring mattresses to sample, plus pillows, toppers, mattress pads, crib mattresses, pet beds, and sheets. We even have the ability to custom configure a test mattress, just for you, to be sure you find your perfect sleep solution. Come take a nap in our cozy bedroom and find out why a SavvyRest will provide the sleep you’ve been dreaming of. **h&h**

*Billy Stevens is a musician and educator as well as the owner of Green Dream Beds. Green Dream Beds is located at 2009 Chapel Hill Rd., Durham; hours are 12:00–6:00 pm, Thurs–Sat, and by appointment, Sun–Wed. For more information, call (919) 321-1284; email [greenreambeds@gmail.com](mailto:greenreambeds@gmail.com); or find us on the web: [www.greenreambeds.com](http://www.greenreambeds.com).*