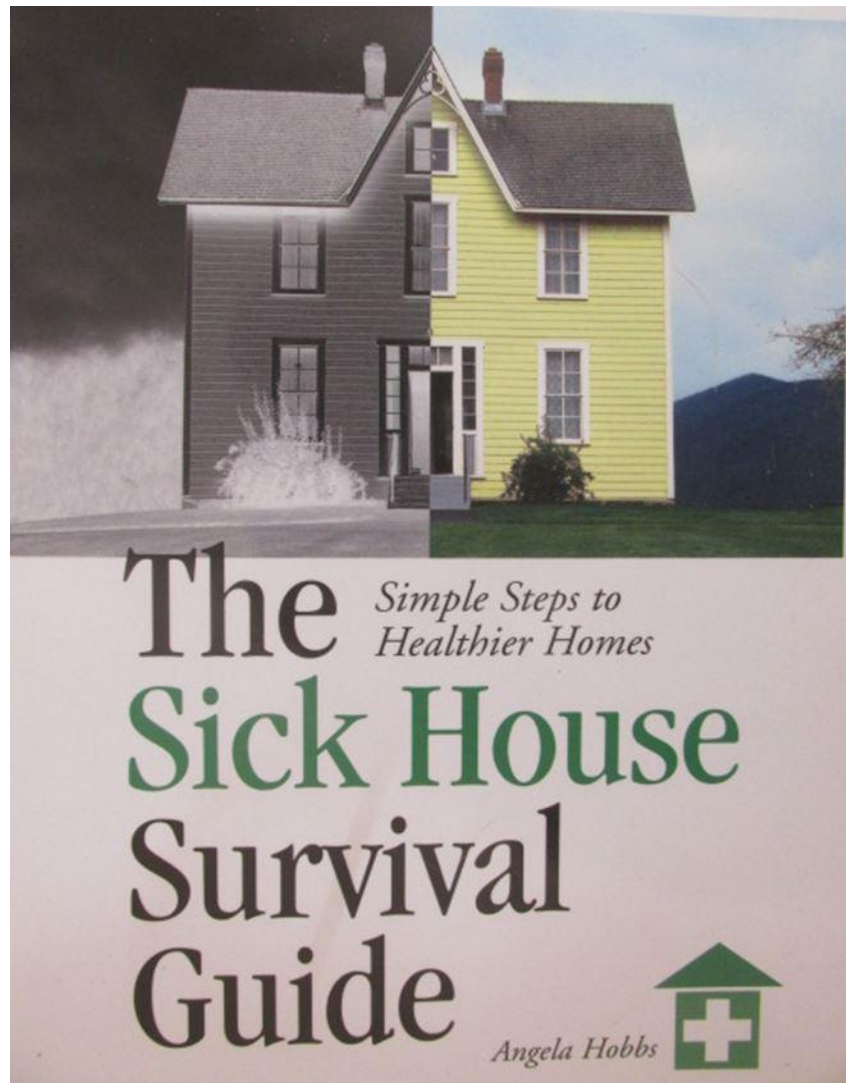


The Sick House Survival Guide by Angela Hobbs

Book review



The story of how a family got sick when they moved into a newly renovated high-EMF house in 1996.

Keywords: sick building, EMF, mold, dirty electricity, chemical sensitivity, MCS, electrical sensitivity, history, doctors, Angela Hobbs, review

This is a powerful story about a family of four that moved into a newly renovated older house outside Toronto, Canada. The house had new carpet, fresh paint, refinished hardwood floors, new linoleum and new cabinets made of particle

boards. The basement was moldy and there were apparently high levels of electromagnetic radiation (EMF) and dirty electricity.

The author, Angela Hobbs, was a homemaker so she stayed in the house all day long while her husband and two young children went to work and school. Two weeks after they moved in Angela started to get strange symptoms, which kept getting worse over the following months. She became lethargic and so forgetful she even forgot to pick her kids up at school several times. She was unable to keep up with the house work. She once got so disoriented in a toxic store that her six-year-old son had to lead her out into the fresh air.

She was fine if the house was vigorously ventilated with a giant fan, but soon after it was closed up again the symptoms came back. She was also fine when going to a park.

Her symptoms kept getting worse, with swellings inside her head and jaw, tingling sensations, joint pains, drenching night sweats, and a range of emotional symptoms.

Her family physician did a range of lab tests that all showed “perfect health.” He suggested it was all just anxiety. Then she went to a second and a third doctor, neither of whom had any better suggestions.

Eventually she had two doctors, her husband and a trusted friend all pressuring her to get psychiatric treatment for her out-of-control “anxiety.”

The big “aha moment” was when the family went to visit a friend. All Angela’s symptoms disappeared there and returned when they got home. They then tried to stay at a nearby motel – again the symptoms disappeared and she was her usual self until returning home.

The internet was very limited and primitive in 1996, with no information about sick buildings, MCS or electrical sensitivities. But Angela was now certain the problem was the house itself and went on a quest to clean up the family’s environment. She started getting rid of toxic household cleaners, fragrances, synthetic clothing and bedding, toxic personal care products and got filtered water. She also looked into the food they ate.

This helped, but not enough. She still felt better when going to a park or a lake. And now her husband and one of her young sons also started to have prolonged health problems.

Eventually someone suggested she looked at the electrical environment in the house. That was very avant garde in 1996. Instruments to measure the EMF were not readily available yet and neither were consultants. She had to make do using her own body as the “instrument.” Eventually she figured out using an AM radio to pick up electrical noise, which apparently was high throughout the house, indicating high levels of dirty electricity (a term not yet invented in 1996).

These efforts helped. The family found safer places to sleep and had more restful nights, but eventually they had to move away. This finally solved all the problems and Angela’s health was fully restored. They got out in time before there were permanent health damage.

The second half of the book

The second half of the book provides suggestions on how to systematically identify problems in the home, such as laundry products, food items, clothing and electronics. The method completely relies on a person to test by recording symptoms, which is difficult and very time consuming. It simply won’t work for some people, but at least it gives an idea of all the things to look at.

The book’s coverage of how to deal with EMF issues is dated and sometimes not really correct or helpful. When the book was published in 2003 gaussmeters were available from several mail order sources, but they are never mentioned. They greatly simplify the testing and eliminates a lot of guesswork.

There are many small things such as calling sources of EMF “power sources,” which is confusing. There are also directly incorrect statements, such as:

Bear in mind that wires carrying unused electricity behave like antennae. Electricity that comes into our homes moves to an appliance when it is used... If it arrives and is not needed, it heads back down the wire.

This is upside down from reality. It is when an appliance consumes electricity that there is a current which generates a magnetic field. If the appliance does not consume electricity there is no magnetic field, and the current does not “head back.” There is always an electrical field around the wire, which is the same regardless of whether the appliance consumes electricity.

Another example of an incorrect statement is:

When more electricity is pushed down a wire than it is designed to carry, the amount that is wasted along the way increases. This wasted electricity along the length of the wire add to the already high levels of EMF...

More electricity (current) on a wire increases the magnetic field, regardless of whether the wire is overloaded or not. It is correct that an overloaded wire wastes electricity, but it is in the form of heat and not EMF.

It is also mentioned a couple of times that there is a high water table, which is said to reflect EMF back up into the house. Water does not really reflect low frequency EMF, but it may conduct stray electricity.

The book frequently mentions the theory that the EMF health effects involve melatonin. It is presented as fact, even though it was just a theory – which is no longer popular.

This part of the book also tends to get rather preachy, such as:

You just want to scream at the doctors...

Those of us who have experienced the failures of mainstream medicine can understand the sentiment, but others might find it off-putting.

Comments

This book provides a compelling and easy to read story that is well worth reading. It is remarkable what Angela Hobbs was able to figure out in 1996, which was nearly the stone age for some of these issues. The story is still relevant.

The symptoms described are all common for someone with MCS and electrical sensitivity. The story is consistent and similar to what others have experienced so it is all quite believable.

The second part of the book can be skipped, or should be read with much skepticism. There is better coverage of that elsewhere.

Today, more than twenty years later, there is much more information available about all these issues, but mainstream medicine still does not accept them. The big question is how many people have not figured things out and instead become sentenced to permanent drug-induced stupors at the hands of psychiatrists? This is still very much a problem.

It would have been very interesting to have the house thoroughly inspected and measured by an EMF expert, using the knowledge and instruments available today

There was a transformer substation nearby and power lines to other areas. It was also an older neighborhood so the underground water pipes were probably of steel. And all the houses were heated by electricity. The amount of stray electricity across the neighborhood could have been very high, explaining why Hobbs didn't feel much better outside the house.

Her statement that her radio was filled with static noise throughout the house indicates very high levels of dirty electricity (transients) on the wiring. Where did that come from? She did figure out to turn off the obvious sources but it apparently persisted, so there must have been other sources.

Reference

The sick house survival guide, Angela Hobbs, New Society Publishers (Canada), 2003.

More information

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