

OTTAWA CONSTRUCTION CLEANING

Dust & Air Quality

Construction dust management, HEPA filtration, HVAC vent cleaning, air scrubber use, and restoring indoor air quality after renovation or building work.

5 Expert Answers from Clean IQ

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Table of Contents

1. How do I remove renovation dust from recessed pot lights without damaging them in Ottawa?
.....
2. What VOC levels are acceptable after new cabinet and flooring installation in Ontario?
.....
3. What type of furnace filter should I install after construction dust contamination in Ottawa?
.....
4. How do I clean fine plaster dust from fabric furniture after a wall repair in Ottawa?
.....
5. What is the cost of having an HRV system cleaned after construction in my Ottawa home?
.....

How do I remove renovation dust from recessed pot lights without damaging them in Ottawa?

Recessed pot lights are one of the trickiest surfaces to clean after a renovation, and getting them right matters both for appearance and for air quality in your home. Construction dust accumulates heavily inside pot light housings because the fixtures create a natural funnel effect — warm air rising from the room draws fine particles up through the trim ring and into the housing cavity, where they settle on the bulb, the socket, and the interior reflector surface. In Ottawa's dry winter heating season, where indoor humidity can drop to **15 to 20 percent**, this effect is dramatically amplified, and dust becomes so fine and electrostatically charged that it clings stubbornly to every interior surface of the fixture.

Cleaning Pot Lights Safely After a Renovation

The first and most important rule is to **turn off the circuit breaker** for the affected lights before you touch them — not just the wall switch. Construction dust can include conductive particles from drywall compound, metal shavings, and concrete, and working inside an energized fixture with any moisture or conductive debris present is a genuine safety hazard. Let the bulbs cool completely if the lights were recently on, as LED and halogen bulbs retain heat and can cause burns or thermal shock if cleaned while warm.

Begin by running an **air scrubber or HEPA vacuum** in the room for at least 30 minutes before you start cleaning the fixtures. This is critical because disturbing dust inside pot lights releases fine particles back into the air, and without active filtration running, those particles simply resettle on the surfaces you just cleaned. A standard household vacuum will recirculate fine construction dust through its exhaust — this is the number one mistake Ottawa homeowners make after renovations. If you don't have access to a HEPA vacuum, a clean, dry microfibre cloth used very gently is safer than a standard vacuum for the interior of the housing.

For the **trim ring and exterior visible surfaces**, a lightly dampened microfibre cloth works well. Avoid any spray cleaners directly on or near the fixture — liquid can wick into the electrical housing through gaps around the trim. For the interior reflector bowl, use a dry microfibre cloth or a soft natural-bristle brush to gently loosen dust, then immediately capture it with a HEPA vacuum held close to the opening. Work slowly and methodically — rushing causes dust clouds that defeat the purpose of cleaning.

Never use compressed air to blow out pot light housings. This is a common shortcut that simply launches fine construction dust into the room's air column, where it remains suspended for 48 to 72 hours and resettles on every surface you've already cleaned, including floors, countertops, and furniture.

In Ottawa, pot lights in new construction or major renovations are almost always connected to the home's HVAC system through the ceiling cavity. This means dust that accumulates in pot light housings is often a symptom of a larger duct contamination issue. **HVAC duct cleaning** — which runs **\$400 to \$800** for a typical Ottawa home — should be done after any major renovation, and cleaning your pot lights without addressing the ductwork means the system will simply blow fresh dust back into the fixtures every time it cycles.

For high ceilings, cathedral ceilings, or pot lights in stairwells where safe ladder access is difficult, this is genuinely a job for a professional post-construction cleaning crew. They carry the right HEPA equipment, work safely at height, and can coordinate with duct cleaning services. You can browse cleaning contractors in the Ottawa area through the **Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com** — it's a free resource to find and contact local professionals directly.

Q2

What VOC levels are acceptable after new cabinet and flooring installation in Ontario?

Post-construction VOC levels after cabinet and flooring installation are a legitimate health concern, and Ontario does have guidance on this — though the regulatory picture is more nuanced than a single pass/fail number.

Understanding VOC Standards in Ontario After Cabinet and Flooring Work

Ontario does not currently have a mandatory residential indoor air quality standard specifically for VOC concentrations after renovation work. However, **Health Canada's Residential Indoor Air Quality Guidelines** provide the most relevant benchmarks for Canadian homeowners. For formaldehyde — the most common VOC offgassed by cabinetry, engineered flooring, and adhesives — Health Canada recommends a long-term exposure limit of **50 micrograms per cubic metre** and a short-term limit of **123 micrograms per cubic metre** over one hour. These are the numbers most Ontario building professionals and indoor air quality consultants reference.

The specific VOC sources in your project matter enormously. New kitchen or bathroom cabinets made with MDF, particleboard, or plywood cores are significant formaldehyde sources — the urea-formaldehyde resins used in these composite wood products continue offgassing for weeks to months after installation. Engineered hardwood and laminate flooring add another layer, particularly if installed with adhesive. Luxury vinyl plank (LVP), which has become extremely popular in Ottawa renovations over the past several years, can offgas plasticizers and other compounds depending on the product's certification level. Solid hardwood flooring finished on-site with polyurethane coatings produces some of the highest short-term VOC concentrations of any residential renovation

material — Ottawa homes finished with oil-based polyurethane in winter, when windows stay sealed against minus 25 degree temperatures, can reach VOC levels that cause headaches and respiratory irritation within hours of application.

CARB Phase 2 compliance (California Air Resources Board) is the international benchmark most commonly referenced for composite wood products sold in Canada, including cabinet boxes and flooring underlayment. Products meeting CARB Phase 2 limits formaldehyde emissions to 0.05 ppm for hardwood plywood, 0.09 ppm for MDF, and 0.18 ppm for particleboard. Ask your cabinet supplier or flooring contractor to confirm CARB Phase 2 or equivalent ULEF (Ultra-Low Emitting Formaldehyde) certification for any products used in your renovation.

From a practical Ottawa standpoint, **ventilation timing is critical**. Winter installations are the highest-risk scenario — new cabinets and flooring installed in January or February in a sealed Ottawa home with the furnace running constantly will accumulate VOCs far faster than the same installation done in May with windows open. The standard industry recommendation is aggressive ventilation for a minimum of **72 hours after installation**, running exhaust fans continuously and opening windows when outdoor temperatures allow. For winter installations, running an HRV (heat recovery ventilator) at maximum capacity is the most practical option, as it exchanges stale indoor air with fresh outdoor air without the massive heat loss of simply opening windows at minus 20.

If you have health sensitivities, young children, or elderly family members in the home, consider having an **indoor air quality test** done 48 to 72 hours after installation. Several Ottawa-area environmental testing companies offer VOC sampling with lab analysis — costs typically run **\$300 to \$600** for a residential assessment. This gives you actual measured data rather than estimates.

For questions about HVAC and ventilation contractors who can help optimize your home's air exchange after a renovation, the **Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com** lists contractors across multiple trades. If your renovation also needs a post-construction deep clean to remove dust and residue before move-in, browsing the cleaning contractors in that directory is a practical next step — a professional clean combined with proper ventilation gives you the best starting point for healthy indoor air after cabinet and flooring work.

Q3

What type of furnace filter should I install after construction dust contamination in Ottawa?

Furnace filter selection after construction dust contamination is an important decision, but it sits just outside the core scope of post-construction cleaning advice I can offer here. Choosing the right furnace filter involves HVAC system specifications, airflow ratings, and equipment compatibility — that is really a question for an HVAC technician or your furnace manufacturer rather than a cleaning advisor.

What I Can Tell You About Construction Dust and Your HVAC System

What I *can* speak to directly is why your HVAC system needs serious attention after any Ottawa construction or renovation project, and what the cleaning side of that equation looks like.

Ottawa's winter construction conditions create an especially severe dust problem for HVAC systems. When indoor humidity drops to **15 to 20 percent** during heating season, construction dust — particularly drywall dust and concrete dust — becomes extraordinarily fine and airborne. Your furnace runs constantly during cold months, and that means it is actively pulling this fine particulate through your ductwork and distributing it throughout every room in the home. By the time construction wraps up, your ducts can be heavily coated with a layer of compacted fine dust that no filter change alone will resolve.

Professional duct cleaning is strongly recommended after any major renovation or new build in Ottawa.

This is not a DIY task — it requires commercial-grade negative pressure equipment, rotary brush systems, and HEPA filtration to properly extract contamination from the full duct network. For a typical Ottawa home, professional duct cleaning runs **\$400 to \$800**, and it should be completed before you install any new filter, because running the system through dirty ducts defeats the purpose of a clean filter entirely.

For specific filter recommendations — MERV ratings, filter thickness, compatibility with your specific furnace model — I would encourage you to contact an HVAC contractor directly. If you need help finding one in the Ottawa area, the **Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com** lists HVAC contractors alongside cleaning and other construction trades. It is a free resource you can browse at your own pace to find someone who can assess your system properly and give you a filter recommendation based on your actual equipment.

How do I clean fine plaster dust from fabric furniture after a wall repair in Ottawa?

Fine plaster dust from a wall repair is one of the most stubborn household cleaning challenges, and Ottawa's dry winter air makes it significantly worse. When indoor humidity drops to 15 to 20 percent during heating season — which is typical in Ottawa homes from November through March — plaster and drywall dust becomes extraordinarily fine and airborne, settling deep into fabric fibres, cushion seams, and upholstery weave in ways that simply wiping or shaking cannot address. The good news is that with the right approach and a bit of patience, fabric furniture can be thoroughly cleaned after a small wall repair without professional help.

Cleaning Plaster Dust from Fabric Furniture the Right Way

The single most important rule is **do not rub the dust**. Rubbing plaster dust into fabric fibres embeds it deeper and can permanently bond the alkaline mineral particles to the fabric, especially if any moisture is present. Plaster is calcium-based and slightly alkaline, which means it can react with fabric dyes and synthetic fibres if it gets wet while still embedded. Your first step should always be dry removal before any moisture touches the furniture.

Begin with a **HEPA vacuum** using an upholstery attachment on the lowest suction setting. This is critical — a standard household vacuum will capture the visible dust but exhaust the finest particles right back into the air through its filter, redepositing them on your furniture within hours. If you do not own a HEPA vacuum, many Ottawa hardware and equipment rental stores carry them, and rental typically runs **40 to 80 dollars per day**. Work in slow, overlapping passes from the top of each cushion downward, vacuuming seams, crevices, and the back and sides of each piece. Remove cushions and vacuum both sides as well as the furniture frame beneath them.

After dry vacuuming, use a **slightly damp microfibre cloth** — not wet, just barely damp — to gently blot remaining dust from the fabric surface. Microfibre is ideal because its fine fibres trap and hold particles rather than pushing them around. Work in small sections and rinse your cloth frequently in clean water, wringing it nearly dry each time. Avoid circular scrubbing motions; use straight blotting strokes instead. For upholstery with a visible nap or texture, stroke in the direction of the fabric grain.

Ottawa's winter heating season creates a particular challenge here: **low humidity causes fabric to hold a static charge**, which actively attracts and holds fine dust particles. An anti-static fabric spray, available at most Ottawa grocery or hardware stores, can help release this static charge and make vacuuming more effective. Running a humidifier in the room for 24 hours before cleaning — bringing humidity up to 40 to 50 percent — also reduces static and makes dust easier to lift from fabric surfaces.

For fabric furniture with removable covers, check the care label. If machine washing is permitted, a cold-water gentle cycle will remove residual plaster dust effectively. Add a cup of white vinegar to the rinse cycle — this neutralizes the alkalinity of plaster residue and helps prevent any lingering stiffness in the fabric. Air dry rather than using a dryer, as heat can set any remaining mineral residue into the fibres.

One practical Ottawa tip: **open windows for ventilation during cleaning only when outdoor temperatures allow**. In winter, opening windows brings in extremely cold, dry air that increases static and can cause moisture from damp cloths to evaporate too quickly. In spring and summer, good ventilation genuinely helps by carrying disturbed dust particles out of the room rather than letting them resettle.

If the wall repair was more extensive than a small patch — say, a full section of drywall replacement or plaster skim coat over a large area — the dust load in your home may be significant enough that professional cleaning is worth considering. Fine construction dust remains suspended in the air for **48 to 72 hours** after disturbance, meaning furniture you cleaned today may be re-coated tomorrow from dust still circulating through your HVAC system. In that case, having your ducts cleaned and running an air scrubber in the affected rooms is a smart investment before attempting furniture cleaning. You can browse cleaning contractors who handle post-renovation cleanup through the **Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com** if the scope of the project warrants professional help.

Q5

What is the cost of having an HRV system cleaned after construction in my Ottawa home?

HRV system cleaning after construction in Ottawa typically costs between \$400 and \$800 for a residential home, with most homeowners paying around \$600 for a thorough post-construction cleaning. This specialized service is essential after any major renovation or new construction because Ottawa's extreme winter conditions mean your Heat Recovery Ventilator runs constantly during the 5-6 month heating season, and construction dust gets deeply embedded in the system's heat exchanger core, filters, and ductwork.

Why HRV Cleaning is Critical After Construction

Post-construction HRV cleaning is more complex than standard HVAC duct cleaning because the heat recovery ventilator has unique components that trap fine construction particles. The heat exchanger core, which transfers heat between incoming fresh air and outgoing stale air, becomes clogged with drywall dust, sawdust, and concrete particles. During Ottawa's heating season when indoor humidity drops to 15-20%, this construction dust becomes

extremely fine and airborne, settling throughout your HRV system. **The system's continuous operation during winter construction means contaminated air circulates throughout your entire home** until the HRV is properly cleaned.

Professional HRV cleaning after construction includes removing and washing the heat exchanger core, replacing all filters, cleaning intake and exhaust ducts, sanitizing the unit housing, and testing airflow balance. The heat exchanger core requires careful handling because it's made of thin aluminum or plastic sheets that can be damaged by aggressive cleaning. **Contractors use specialized low-pressure washing techniques and mild detergents** to clean the core without compromising its efficiency.

In Ottawa's climate, your HRV system is essential for maintaining indoor air quality while conserving energy. A contaminated system after construction will reduce heat recovery efficiency by 20-40% and continuously recirculate construction dust particles throughout your home. The Ontario Building Code requires mechanical ventilation in new homes, making HRV cleaning a necessary step before occupancy permits are issued.

Timing matters significantly in Ottawa - schedule HRV cleaning after all dusty construction work is complete but before final occupancy. Spring is the busiest season for this service as winter-delayed projects rush to completion. Expect 2-4 week booking delays from April through June. The cleaning process takes 3-5 hours and requires shutting down your ventilation system, so plan accordingly during extreme weather periods.

For professional HRV cleaning after construction, you can browse qualified contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com, where you'll find specialists experienced with post-construction HVAC cleaning in Ottawa's unique climate conditions.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Construction Cleaning. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any post-construction cleaning or renovation cleanup project. Information is current as of August 23, 2026 and may change. Visit ottawaconstructioncleaning.com for the latest answers.