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# Black Stains in Houses: Soot, Dust, or Ghosts?

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by Frank Vigil

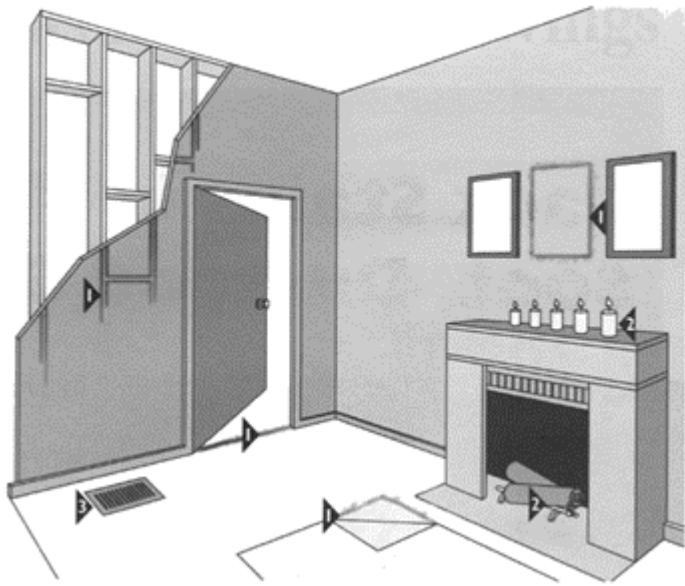
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**Builders are never more surprised than when they walk into one of their newly built model homes and find black stains at wall-to-floor joints and on previously pristine carpeting underneath doorways. What causes these stains and how can builders and homeowners prevent them?**

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**Aromatic candles in this designer bathroom might look elegant, but because they contain a high concentration of oils, they are causing soot deposition throughout the home.**



**Figure 1. Ghosting stains have been seen on interior and exterior wall surfaces; on carpet surfaces at wall-to-floor connections or door undercuts; on ceilings; on furniture, around wall and floor coverings, and numerous other places (1). For a stain to appear, two factors must be present. There must be a source of particulate matter, like the carbon soot from candles or gas log fireplaces (2) and there must be a driving force, like gravity, electric attraction, or a forced air unit (3) to push the particulate against a surface.**



**B**y now, we've all heard about "black soot" or "ghosting"--one of the hottest topics in the building industry today. The dark marks have been seen on interior and exterior wall surfaces; on carpet surfaces at wall-to-floor connections or door undercuts; on ceilings; on furniture, heating and air conditioning filters, blinds, drapes, doors, countertops, television screens and computer monitors; and on the top side and leading edges of ceiling fans.

The most recent and increasingly common form of staining is caused not by dirt or dust but by soot (see ["Dirt and Dust Also Cause Ghosting Stains"](#)). Ghosting from soot is seen primarily in more recent construction, but diagnosticians have detected soot stains in older residences as well. Typically, newer homes--often still under warranty--are the focus of attention. There have even

