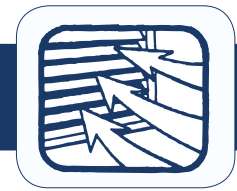


■ Indoor Air Quality



FOR PEOPLE WHO WORK in offices, schools, shelters, hospitals and similar locations, the quality of the air is often the most obvious problem they face day after day.

Most of the buildings we find ourselves in depend on mechanical ventilation systems to supply the air that we breathe. Poor indoor air quality (IAQ) can cause a number of symptoms:

- Tiredness and fatigue
- Headaches
- Irritated eyes, nose or throat
- Nausea
- Bacterial infection

In addition, a common problem in buildings is uneven distribution of temperature: in simple words, some parts of the building are too hot and some parts of the building are too cold.

These problems can be caused by a number of problems in the ventilation system. The more information you can gather about what the problems are and where in the building they are, the easier it will be to figure out the problem and work to get it fixed.

■ COLLECTING INFORMATION

A good place to start is by surveying your co-workers to find out how many people are experiencing symptoms or discomfort; where in the building they are located; how often they have the discomfort or symptoms; and when it occurs. (In some cases we have found that the ventilation system has been shut down for the day at 4:00 even though workers are still in the building for many hours after that.) A sample survey is attached in Appendix A of this booklet for you to use at your worksite.

The second step is to talk to the building maintenance staff. They usually have the most “hands on” information about what is going on in the building. They can tell you about the ventilation system, but they also usually know things like when pesticides are applied, whether any

renovations are going on, and other activities that could affect the air quality.

Inspect the building. You can look for some signs of where the problem may be coming from.

Some common problems are:

- Moisture or water stains on walls, ceilings or floors.
- Any visible mold growth.
- Covered air vents.
- Dirty ventilation filters.
- Odors from food, garbage or chemicals.
- Note any areas that are too cold, too hot, or just stuffy.



■ SOLUTIONS

The solutions will obviously be dependent on what specific problems were found, so not every solution listed here will apply to all situations.

Some common solutions used to improve air quality are:

- Increase the ventilation rate. Sometimes there is simply not enough air coming through the system.
- Move some office machinery to an area that is isolated from everyday work.
- Make sure cleaning happens on a regular schedule to avoid accumulated food and other garbage.

- Maintain a humidity rate between 30 and 60 percent. If the humidity is too low, dry and irritated eyes, nose and throat are common. If the humidity is too high, it makes it easier for mold to grow.
- “Balance” the ventilation system to make sure that the temperature and air flow is even throughout the work areas.
- Clean and maintain the ventilation system on a regular basis.



PESH WHAT THE LAW REQUIRES

Unfortunately, there are no PESH standards that require your employer to address indoor air quality problems. It is best to work through the union to address these issues.

