

Indoor Air Quality

Many of us spend a substantial portion of our day inside our campus buildings. Sometimes, we may experience health problems and wonder if they are related to the building's structure, furnishings, heating, ventilation, air conditioning system or the way we operate our buildings and the materials we use inside them. We have prepared this page to address your indoor air quality concerns, assist university employees and students in reporting any indoor air quality problems, and to advise you of the investigative process.

Health Effects

Health effects range from immediate effects, which may show up after a single exposure to long term effects. Many different symptoms are associated with indoor air quality complaints ranging from fatigue and eye and skin irritation to respiratory complaints. Generally these symptoms disappear upon leaving the building and reappear after the person returns and resumes work in the building.

What Causes Indoor Air Quality Problems in Offices?

Some of the more common indoor air quality problems on campus have been found to be aggravated or caused by one or a combination of the following:

- Inadequate Ventilation
- Custodial Activities
- Maintenance Activities
- Construction/Renovation
- High Occupant Density
- Energy Efficient Practices
- Seasonal Changes
- Improper use of Thermostat Controls

What Can Be Done To Improve The Air Quality In Your Workplace?

- Forbid Smoking
- Restrict Perfume, Cologne, & Potpourri Products
- Substitute Less Hazardous Materials
- Report all problems to your Facility Administrator

The Facility Administrator will coordinate all communication between the building occupants and University Officials and provide ongoing updates to the building occupants.

Typical Indoor Air Pollutants:

- Biologicals
- Allergens (mold, pollen)
- Infectious disease agents (virus, bacteria)
- Carbon Monoxide
- Formaldehyde
- Organic Gasses
- Environmental Tobacco Smoke
- Radon
- Asbestos (if it deteriorates, it could become friable and release fibers into the air)

Air sampling is typically performed if a known pollutant source is found or on advice of a Physician who has clinically evaluated the building occupant(s). Often air sampling results are well below regulated health levels even though these same levels may cause irritant effects. While an odor may be very irritating, it may not be hazardous and some hazardous chemicals are undetectable by the human nose.

What To Do If You Suspect a Problem:

Sudden onset of obnoxious odor or smell:

Contact Public Safety at 436-3311 immediately.

Non-Specific Complaints (Pollutant Source Typically Unknown):

Contact Facility Administrator and complete a complaint form to start an investigation process.

The Investigation Process

For Non-Specific Complaints, either Public Safety or the Facility Administrator notifies Environmental Health and Safety about the indoor air quality problem. Environmental Health & Safety will then:

- request an evaluation of the mechanical/structural components of the building
- conduct a site visit
- interview building occupants, (who may be requested to complete a log of their health symptoms and activities)
- keep the Facility Administrator apprised of the investigation progress
- conduct air sampling to determine exposure levels if an identifiable continuing pollutant source is found
- produce a written report at the end of the investigation with recommendations to Facility Administrator and the Department Head of the component(s)