

TEN NO COST/LOW COST WAYS TO IMPROVE INDOOR AIR QUALITY

(Give this to your building manager)

1. Organize a Volunteer Air Safety Task Force

Each building is unique and has its own set of environmental problems. The volunteer team can talk to occupants, install suggestion boxes, conduct anonymous surveys to determine health complaints, gather suggestions, make appropriate recommendations to management and publish informational bulletins to educate tenants and occupants.

2. Prevent Unpleasant Odors (instead of covering them up)

Fragrance Emission Devices and Deodorizing Agents are used in public buildings to mask unpleasant odors. Most people do not realize these products are designed to affect the human central nervous system and can cause many health disorders (read the label and check out the potential health effects of the chemicals).

Prevent odors through actions including: covering trash receptacles, removing trash on an as-needed basis, using detergents in toilet bowl dispensers rather than deodorizers, cleaning on a routine basis, restricting the use of aerosols (including perfumes, hairsprays and deodorants), using fragrance-free hand-soap in restrooms, creating a smoke-free policy; installing and operating efficient exhaust fans.

3. Post Advance Warning Signs

Post prominent signs to alert sensitive populations (pregnant women, children, the elderly, those undergoing chemotherapy, the immune compromised and those with disabilities) in advance of remodeling, painting, and heavy cleaning activities. Signs should include dates, times, pertinent locations and the activity.

Provide temporary alternate work areas and other reasonable accommodations for those who may be affected by remodeling activities.

4. Educate Your Maintenance Staff

Instruct your staff to scrutinize all cleaning chemicals and disinfectants before purchasing and/or using them.

Purchase least toxic products and use disinfectants only when and where absolutely necessary. Many cleaning chemicals contain pesticide ingredients. All disinfectants are pesticides. Pesticide registration with the U.S. EPA is required by law to ensure that proper warning and use directions are on pesticide labels.

Alert your staff that cleaning chemicals and disinfectants may also contain petroleum-based fragrances and other toxic substances that are harmful to health, especially when they are not measured appropriately, are over applied, and/or used in enclosed spaces. .

5. Avoid Pesticide Use

Routine pest control applications are expensive, unnecessary, contaminate buildings, and affect the health of the people in the buildings. The National Environmental Educational Training Foundation (NEETF) is conducting a massive campaign to educate physicians and nurses about the health effects of pesticides on humans (www.neetf.org). The Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta has conducted studies recently and documented the retention of pesticides in human blood. The highest levels of pesticides appeared in the blood of children.

Cancel all routine and scheduled pesticide applications. Use prevention and integrated pest management practices to control insects and other pests. Use pesticides only when and where absolutely necessary when all other methods have failed. Organic products for lawns and herbal remedies to prevent pest infestations are proving to be popular and successful.

6. Purchase only low VOC products

Be on the lookout for safer paint formulations, adhesives, sealants, furniture and other products that will provide your building with a safer indoor air environment. Manufacturers are now aware of the health risks of products containing VOCs (volatile organic compounds) and are creating less toxic products.

7. Ventilate, ventilate, ventilate...

Adequate ventilation will reduce mold problems, remove the exhaust from copy machine and other office equipment, lower ozone levels, provide more oxygen in the air, and remove stale odors. Install efficient exhaust fans where needed.

Increase fresh air ventilation of elevator shafts and monitor the effects of wind direction on building pollution. Underground parking garages and those attached to buildings create the potential for carbon monoxide in building air. Create parking garage idling/warm up prohibition policy to avoid unnecessary emissions.

Increase fresh air to 100% during remodeling to reduce/eliminate unnecessary occupant illness.

8. Carpet Do's and Don'ts

Thoroughly vacuum carpeted areas daily (or more often when/where required) to remove trapped dirt and residues from perfume, smoke, and pesticides that are tracked in from the outdoors. Avoid scented vacuum cleaner bags, potpourri or other carpet fresheners as these products pollute the air.

Clean carpeting safely by using least toxic, perfume free carpet cleaning products. Do not use deodorizers and stain repellent chemicals as these become imbedded in carpeting fibers and padding and outgas to create more indoor air pollution.

When carpeting needs to be replaced, consider using safer alternatives that include hardwood flooring, ceramic tile, and other low VOC flooring materials. Carpeting harbors dirt, mold, pesticides and other toxic chemicals that are nearly impossible to completely remove and which become airborne when disturbed. Most carpet padding and adhesives contribute to indoor air pollution.

9. Pick storage areas wisely

The location of storage areas is crucial to good indoor air. Never store gasoline, toxic chemicals, cleaning products, disinfectants, equipment, machinery and other toxic or air polluting items near ventilation systems or fresh air intakes.

Do not store sanitary paper products near disinfectants and cleaners because they will absorb the chemicals and their odors.

10. Maintain, maintain, maintain...

Properly maintain furnace and filters using additional HEPA or other types of filtration

Fix all leaks in roof/flashing

Keep plumbing in excellent repair to avoid leaking and subsequent mold

Maintain low humidity in the building to avoid mold problems

The Ohio Network for the Chemically Injured (ONFCI) conducted an informal poll to determine the above "top ten" causes of building air pollution and any potential solutions that would be readily achievable and no/low cost. The Indoor Environmental Quality Report recently published by the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS), under the auspices of the U.S. Access Board (<http://www.access-board.gov/news/ieq.htm>), was used as a resource. ONFCI's president, Toni Temple, participated in the NIBS/Access Board project both as a Project Steering Committee member and as a member of the four working committees. A copy of the NIBS report is available on the NIBS website at <http://ieq.nibs.org>. The report will provide additional information and serve as a useful reference tool.

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