

Your Green Team May Ask...

How can we convince co-workers to participate?

Everybody breathes! Salaried and hourly workers alike share the air. While some individuals may be more affected by contaminants than others, harmful IAQ conditions can eventually bother everyone.

Everyone is interested in feeling better. Perform the **Better Breathing Bureau Skit** (see **Tools**, page 34) as an employee lunch-and-learn, to introduce ideas about how healthier air helps people feel better.

What IAQ factors can employees affect?

- A Green Team in almost any workplace can research and effectively recommend measures to control environmental tobacco smoke and proper storage and use of many kinds of chemical pollutants.
- Skillful negotiators armed with good data and compelling case studies may influence cleaning contracts by making the health case for Green Cleaning and non-toxic pest control.

- Purchasing, remodeling and design decisions may be influenced to minimize the use of toxic or off-gassing substances by selecting low-emitting materials instead.

- Some basic modification or improved maintenance of air filtration media and air delivery systems may be accomplished through Green Team efforts.
- Businesses that employ an industrial hygienist or IAQ specialist may realize significant benefits from Green Team efforts when effective communications with other staff, research, and partnerships build the case for investing in IAQ improvements beyond those needed to meet minimum workplace health and safety standards.

- If your business owns and operates its own physical facility, your Green Team's influence over IAQ factors may be much greater than if your business rents space.

- Productivity impacts can be at least informally documented through periodic solicitation of targeted survey information. Formal tracking of health claims, absenteeism and other productivity factors may be possible in cooperation with your company's Human Resources Department.

A Green Team can be an asset to your company.



- Green Team leaders can help incorporate IAQ improvements into remodeling or moving plans, especially when they get involved at the initial planning stage.
- Management of IAQ during construction may be influenced to improve health conditions for construction workers and office staff.

While a workplace Green Team should expect resolution of IAQ issues, it's important to know when to turn a problem over to a facility manager or IAQ specialist. Then Green Team members should step back and support their efforts as needed.

**Expect
Results**

What about IAQ factors beyond our control?

The biggest challenge to employee success with IAQ issues probably comes when a business experiencing IAQ problems is renting space. This situation may be especially problematic in high-rise facilities with multiple tenants, where a property management firm operates the facility on behalf of non-resident owners, and tenants have little control over HVAC systems or cleaning contracts.

Significant ventilation improvements may be beyond your control if, in addition to ownership and management factors:

- You work in a building with few or no operable windows
- You work in a building that has undergone many internal renovations, in which air-handling channels have become too convoluted to track pollution sources without retaining specialized IAQ diagnostic services

Similarly, your Green Team's influence over renovation or redecorating material choices may be curtailed if improvements:

- Occurred before your business moved in
- Are being contracted by owner/manager teams dealing with multiple renovations

In situations where preventive IAQ decision-making is beyond your control, but problematic conditions exist, Green Team members will do well to pursue systematic information gathering through employee surveys. Be sure to track dates, times and specific locations and interactions where IAQ problems occur. Note trends in the occurrences. Then work with your management team to present your well-documented complaint to the property manager or building owner.

Reputable property management firms will respond to reasonable requests. It is in their best interest to consult with an environmental specialist in response to issues that seriously affect tenant health.

- **Time spent resolving IAQ problems can prevent more costly losses of time and money**

An IAQ Investment Pays!

How will we know if our efforts are working?

Ideally, improvements can be observed and complaints should cease, but IAQ problems can be complex. The EPA states, in *Building Air Quality*, that two kinds of criteria can be used to judge the success of efforts to correct an indoor air problem:

- Reduced complaints
- Measurement of properties of the indoor air

Measurement of airflows, ventilation rates and air distribution patterns are the most reliable methods of assessing IAQ intervention success. Measurement of some pollutants, such as mold counts or radon levels, may be necessary. A facility manager or other qualified professional must conduct these assessments and use findings to evaluate whether or not an IAQ problem has been solved.

Part of the purpose of the Green Team approach to IAQ improvement is to involve workers in maintaining their healthy

workplace, so an evaluation should include reviewing the improvement process itself:

- Does management support the IAQ Green Team work?
- Do employees participate candidly and cooperatively?
- Is information handled factually and effectively?
- Are Green Team leaders clearly communicating needs and findings?
- After probable causes are identified, are steps being taken to solve the problem?
- Are successes being used to leverage further improvements?
- Are people feeling better physically?

If the answer to many or all of these questions is "Yes!" you can count your efforts as successful. People are aware of IAQ issues and opportunities. More work may be needed, but constructive processes are in place to maintain a healthy working environment.

IAQ problems can result in:

- Sick days
- Decreased group and individual productivity
- Increased health insurance claims