

A GROWING EPIDEMIC

“Sick Building Syndrome”: A comprehensive series about a growing concern to all people involved in the buildings marketplace. The purpose of this series is to explore the causes, sources, and solutions of pollutants that have been linked to many health and environmental problems.

The issue of indoor air quality is a serious problem that continues to become more prevalent everyday.

Indoor air quality is not only hazardous to our health, but also hazardous to the economic life of our businesses. Loss of building materials and furnishing, drops in productivity, increased health care costs, and even legal liability are all problems that we don't want to deal with.

These very same problems effect everyone involved in the buildings marketplace and they must be informed about concerns. People involved in this particular market must be ready to react to these problems when they happen in their own facilities — and they will happen — and they must react.

Indoor air pollution has spawned a broad array of “solutions” to the building and human problems lumped under the very misleading banner of “Sick Building Syndrome.” These include real solutions from tearing out offensive materials and improving filtration/air circulation to just covering it up.

Indoor air pollution problems were magnified when the energy efficiency standards and materials used by architects and designers changed dramatically in the early 1970's. Circulation of air in an office building was reduced by 80%. With poor circulation, this literally left the door wide open to the many pollutants, bacteria, mold, and mildew that we struggle with everyday.

Working within these pollutant laden enclosed spaces, it is no wonder that many of the world's employees develop symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, burning eyes, and upper respiratory complaints just to name a few. Over time though, the severity steadily gets worse as exposure is prolonged. Reaction to indoor pollutants usually occur 1 to 2 hours after they arrive to work and last 3 to 4 hours after they get home from work.

Emotionally, however, people don't get over impairments that easy. When people are struck by an illness of any type or size, productivity starts to decrease, morale falls, and eventually your could find your company with a high turnover rate of employees. This is especially true if the cause of the illness is unknown.

Buildings themselves suffer as well. Deterioration and structural degradation are common effects of the contamination inside a building. Of course your building is not going to crumble before your own eyes, but over time occupational safety and values of buildings become issues that nobody wants to deal with legally or financially.

Anyone in the buildings marketplace must be concerned with “Sick Building Syndrome” and “Building Related Illness.” The problems are real and are costly. The symptoms may seem clear, but the causes and sources of the biological, chemical, or particulate pollutants are complex. These pollutants and their sources must be understood if protection strategies are to be taken in learning more about these problems to avoid human and building problems.

Next issue we will discuss the causes behind “Sick Building Syndrome” and how they directly relate to the most common and pervasive pollutants.

Series by Kim Strong

AEGIS Environmental (Canada) Limited