

Tips for Preventing IAQ-Related Health Problems



The quality of the air inside your facility can impact the health of your workers. Poor indoor air quality (IAQ) can cause problems ranging from coughing, sneezing and watery eyes to serious respiratory problems.

For example, according to a NIOSH alert, buildings may develop moisture and dampness problems from roof and window leaks, high indoor humidity and flooding, among other things. These problems can lead to the:

- Growth of mould, fungi and bacteria
- Release of volatile organic compounds
- Breakdown of building materials.

Research studies have shown that exposure to such substances has been associated with respiratory symptoms, asthma, hypersensitivity pneumonitis, rhinosinusitis, bronchitis and respiratory infections.

Real-life examples from the alert:

- A single-story office building had a history of recurrent wet carpets due to plumbing problems. Ceiling tiles also showed evidence of leaks. A 48-year-old worker was diagnosed with asthma within six months of starting work in this building.
- Over two years, 6 of 53 workers located on the top floor of an eight-story hospital developed asthma. The hospital had experienced multiple episodes of significant roof and window leaks during heavy rains over several years.

7 Tips for Preventing IAQ-Related Health Problems

To protect your workers from IAQ problems and the related health issues, use this checklist to inspect your facility for some of the common causes of IAQ problems. And make sure that you take steps to address any problems you identify during the inspection.

Here are some additional tips to help you properly maintain the IAQ in your facility before it makes your workers sick:

- Always respond when workers report health concerns that could be linked to IAQ.
- Conduct regular inspections of HVAC systems and promptly correct any problems. (Use this checklist to inspect your ventilation system.)
- Prevent high indoor humidity through the proper design and operation of HVAC systems. (Proper maintenance of ventilation systems is critical to avoiding IAQ problems. Take these six steps to comply with ventilation system maintenance requirements.)
- Dry any porous building materials that have become wet from leaks or flooding within 48 hours.
- Clean and repair or replace any building materials that are moisture-damaged or show evidence of visible mould or mildew growth. (Before you hire a mould remediation consultant, ask them these 10 questions.)
- Inform workers of the respiratory effects caused by exposure in damp buildings and implement a system for responding to complaints of building dampness, musty or mouldy odors, leaks and flooding.
- Establish an IAQ team to oversee implementation of an IAQ program.