



The most intimate contact you have is with the air around you. Considering that you spend up to 90% of your daytime inside buildings, it is remarkable how little attention companies pay to indoor air quality. This is in contrast to the ongoing debate about how best to control outdoor air pollution and its effects on public health.

Since the 1970s many companies installed air conditioning in large office towers across all continents. With airco came the sick building syndrome, acknowledged as one of the main causes of sickness leave. Still, most companies are unaware of the issues they have with poor ventilation, humidity and increased levels of indoor volatile organic compounds (VOCs) emitted by adhesives, carpet fibers, manufactured wood furniture, copiers, etc.

Studies in the U.S. (American Society for Heating, Refrigeration and Air-conditioning Engineers – ASHRAE) and India (Environmental Protection Agency) showed that indoor office air contained toxic contaminant levels that were 10 times higher than the levels measured outside those same buildings.

Clearly people react differently to these contaminants, depending on their allergic sensitivity and physical condition. Doctors in the Benelux have reported that asthma related diseases have more than doubled since 1980, due both to indoor and outdoor air quality deterioration. Asthma increases of 80% have been reported by the American Lung Association. Health officials estimate that at least 20 million people in the U.S. suffer from some form of asthma.

Poor Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) may be one of the main causes of illness inside your company. Short term effects can be throat, nose and eye irritations, coughs and colds, headaches, quicker fatigue, skin allergies, and loss of concentration and coordination. Long term effects can include asthmatic diseases, possible damage to the central nervous system, liver and kidneys, and persistent allergies.

So what can you do to improve your Indoor Air Quality?



Your Safety, Health and Environment staff should hold regular test reviews with the installers of air-conditioners in your building, to ensure proper ventilation and adequate refresh levels. Modern air-co installations may contain a humidifier as well, to compensate for a dry climate caused by air-co. If your office is not air-conditioned, make sure that the indoor air is ventilated regularly. If problems persist, a thorough technical investigation will be required.

One natural way to improve your indoor climate is using green plants. Besides creating a pleasant atmosphere, plants provide a spectacular return on investment.

To find out more, turn to our paper [Living Plants, Your Natural ROI](#).

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