



OPSEU LOCAL 557

# INDOOR AIR QUALITY CONCERNS

## HEALTH AND SAFETY PREVENTION

We all have a part to play for health and safety under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) (OHSA), also referred to as the [Internal Responsibility System](#) (IRS).

### INDOOR AIR QUALITY (IAQ) CONCERNS

[IAQ issues](#) can be prevented by ensuring adequate ventilation, comfortable temperature and humidity levels and minimization of airborne contaminants. **Ensuring good IAQ requires all workers take action.**

#### SOURCES OF IAQ HAZARDS

Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inadequate <a href="#">temperature</a> and <a href="#">humidity</a> levels</li> <li>● Poor HVAC systems (design, engineering and maintenance)</li> <li>● Overcrowding</li> <li>● Partitions blocking ventilation, blocked intakes or outtakes</li> <li>● Renovations that alter space but not HVAC capacity</li> <li>● Excessive <a href="#">noise</a> and poor <a href="#">lighting</a> (not IAQ but work environment)</li> <li>● HVAC operating after workers arrive or shutdown before end of day</li> </ul>
Chemical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <a href="#">Carbon dioxide</a> from building occupants and fuel combustion</li> <li>● <a href="#">Carbon monoxide</a> from <a href="#">vehicle exhaust</a> entering by air intakes</li> <li>● <a href="#">Particulates</a> (dust) from <a href="#">asbestos</a>, <a href="#">lead</a>, <a href="#">silica quartz</a>, fiberglass, <a href="#">wood dust</a>, gases, including <a href="#">formaldehyde</a> and <a href="#">other chemicals</a></li> <li>● <a href="#">Volatile organic compounds</a> (VOCs) from printing machines, computers, carpets, furniture, cleansers, disinfectants, solvents, <a href="#">pesticides</a>, glues, caulking, paints etc.</li> <li>● Ozone from photocopiers, electric motors, electrostatic air cleaners</li> <li>● <a href="#">Radon</a> from naturally occurring radioactivity in minerals and soil</li> <li>● Other sources: tobacco smoke, <a href="#">perfume</a>, food, etc.</li> </ul>
Biological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Microbial contaminants, fungi, <a href="#">moulds</a>, bacteria from damp materials or areas</li> <li>● Dust mites from carpets, fabric, foam chair cushions or <a href="#">bed bugs</a></li> <li>● Pollen and biological aerosols not filtered out due to poor HVAC maintenance</li> <li>● Viruses like influenza, coronavirus etc.</li> </ul>

## SYMPTOMS RELATED TO POOR IAQ

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- Headaches, blurred vision, dryness and irritations of the eyes, nose, throat and skin
- Difficulty concentrating, fatigue, dizziness and nausea
- Shortness of breath, coughing, sneezing, wheezing, sinus congestion
- Hypersensitivity and allergies

Symptoms may develop within hours of starting work and may resolve after leaving, after a weekend or vacation. If workers report similar symptoms, or all workers report symptoms in an area, air quality should be investigated. Poor IAQ can also exacerbate existing allergies or asthma symptoms.

Health issues and illnesses (ex. [dermatitis](#), [asthma](#), [COPD](#), [cancer](#), [silicosis](#)) may start soon after exposure or with some contaminants like asbestos may produce adverse health effects in future. This is why it is important to report and be aware of hazards in your workspace. See the [GBC Virtual Health and Safety Board](#)

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR - WHAT SHOULD YOU REPORT

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- Consistently feeling unwell in workspace (ex. headaches, allergies, respiratory issues)
- Extreme temperatures or humidity in your workspace
- Chemical and unknown odours – in workspace, from vents or new furniture
- Improper air flow or air not moving and/or obstructed intakes or outtake vents
- Accumulation of dust in location and/or vents with dust build up
- Prolonged excessive [noise](#) and/or poor [lighting](#).
- Non functioning building equipment (ex. HVAC, Fumehoods)
- Damaged, leaking pipes, water damage and/or [mould](#) on wood, drywall, upholstery, carpet, vents, ceilings, or other building materials
- Dryers, photocopiers and or laminators with no ventilation or in poorly ventilated areas

## HOW TO REPORT IAQ CONCERNS

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1. Report indoor air quality hazards, issues and concerns to your **Supervisor** (who should contact Health, Safety and Wellness and Facilities to investigate and may fill out a [SAIR form](#))
2. Report any IAQ issues or concerns to your [JHSC Worker Representative](#)

## EMPLOYER DUTIES

Employers and supervisors have an obligation to **take every reasonable precaution** in the circumstances to protect workers. See more duties [here](#).

**Contact your [Joint Health and Safety Committee Worker Representative](#) for advice**

## WORKER DUTIES

- Follow legislation, workplace health and safety policies and procedures
- Wear and use the protective equipment required
- Work and act in a way that will not hurt yourself or anyone else
- Report concerns, hazards, incidents, injuries, or illnesses to your **Supervisor** and exposures, injuries, and illnesses *that require time off work, accommodations, or health care* to [WSIB](#)
  - In case of injury or illness [poster](#)

## YOUR RIGHTS

**RIGHT TO KNOW** - workers have a right to information and instruction about hazards they are exposed to and protocols in place to control exposure.

*View the [Virtual Health and Safety Board](#), ask your Supervisor or [JHSC](#) for more information or clarification*

**RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE** - Workers participate through the Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) which is provided with additional information, the power to identify hazards and make formal recommendations.

*Make suggestions to your Supervisor or through your campus JHSC*

**RIGHT TO REFUSE** - Workers have the [right to refuse unsafe work](#) if they have a reason to believe their work is likely to endanger their health and safety.

*Inform your Supervisor and if you need further guidance contact your [JHSC Worker Representative](#)*

**PROTECTION AGAINST REPRISAL** - You have protection against reprisals under [OHSA](#)

## APPLICABLE LEGISLATION & STANDARDS

- [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#)
- [O. Reg. 851](#): Industrial Establishments
- [O. Reg. 490/09](#): Designated Substances
- [O. Reg. 833](#): Control of Exposure to Biological or Chemical Agents
- [O. Reg. 278/05](#): Designated Substance Asbestos on Construction Projects & in Buildings and Repair
- [O. Reg. 381/15](#): Noise
- [Standard 62.1](#) American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE)

## RESOURCES

- [Ontario Workplace Health and Safety](#)
- [Worker Health and Safety Awareness Four Steps](#)
- [CUPE IAQ Fact Sheet](#)
- [Workers Health and Safety Centre Indoor Air Quality](#)
- [Podcast - Challenges Related to IAQ - Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers \(OHCOW\)](#)
- [Work Environment - Occupational Clinics for Ontario Workers \(OHCOW\)](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety \(CCOHS\) - Indoor Air Quality](#)
- [Workplace Exposure and Illness - Government of Ontario](#)



**SAFETY STARTS WITH YOU**