

# **Indoor Air Quality Program**

## **Overview**

Indoor air quality (IAQ) refers to air quality in indoor office, classroom or laboratory environments, as opposed to industrial or outdoor settings. These areas have either natural ventilation from openable windows, or mechanical ventilation from a heating, ventilating and air-conditioning (HVAC) system. Common causes of air quality complaints include mechanical ventilation failures, inadequate outdoor air supply, odors from indoor or outdoor sources, and mold.

Industrial environments, as well as some laboratories and classrooms, contain sources of air contaminants: chemical, particulate, aerosol, or fumes. These contaminants should be controlled by localized exhaust hoods (e.g., fume hoods), or sometimes by increased general dilution ventilation.

Hunter College employees, students and visitors should have a clean, healthy environment in which to work, study and perform various activities. If the air quality is poor it can affect a person's comfort, health, and productivity. The purpose of the Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) program is to provide and maintain healthy and comfortable environments free of contaminants. A key part of the program is responding to and resolving concerns of building occupants about problems in their work environment.

EHS or Hunter College Facilities generally will respond to and evaluate IAQ concerns. First, we determine if the issue is an emergency and, if so, take immediate action to protect the occupants.

If it is not an emergency and the issue is related to thermal comfort, water intrusion, mold or natural gas odors contact Hunter College Facilities.

For all other issues, EHS should be contacted. We will conduct a preliminary investigation by first talking to occupants to determine if the problem is a one-time event or if the source can be easily identified and resolved.

In more complex situations, where the issue cannot be readily resolved, EHS will gather information about the history of the problem, occupant complaints and/or symptoms, and previous efforts to identify or solve the problem. Based on the occupants' information, and depending on the issues, EHS will determine:

- If the HVAC system is clean and operating properly, supplying adequate outdoor air volume to dilute and exhaust indoor air contaminants (with the assistance of UW Facilities)
- If there are any obvious sources or reservoirs of chemical or microbiological emissions (indoors or outdoors)

- If the temperature and relative humidity are a factor in health symptoms
- If excessive dusts or other particulates are present, and whether they are generated inside the work area or outdoors
- If a space may be occupied safely and without health effects

Not every evaluation identifies a clear source for the air quality issue. Sometimes minor changes to the building or ventilation system are effective, other times significant capital improvements are indicated.

Certain individuals have increased sensitivity to particular chemicals, odors, dusts or allergens when compared to the general population. Sensitive individuals should seek medical attention as needed, and advise their supervisor if they have specific needs so they can be accommodated.