



## ***Indoor Air Quality***

### **Improving worker health**

Indoor air quality is an often overlooked area in our workplaces, especially in our offices where the ventilation is controlled. The air we breathe can lead to numerous health effects and also affect our overall productivity. The American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP) published an excellent article titled, “How Ventilation Can Help Improve Worker Health” in which they discuss the various symptoms employees can experience with poor indoor air quality (such as shortness of breath, coughing, nausea, hypersensitivity of allergies or sinus congestion, etc.), and some steps that could be taken to address the issue. If these are common complaints in your workplace, it may be time to have the ventilation system assessed by a professional to see if a hazard may be present.


Some general things to look for when reviewing the air handling system and the office conditions could be:

- The cleanliness of the registers, return grills, & filters.
- Cleanliness of the ductwork.
  - Shine a light into the supply registers to get an idea of any dust build-up or mold growth inside the ducts.
- If feasible, determine where the air supply or makeup air is coming from for the air handling system.
  - Sometimes the supply air can be located close to exhaust from other sources such as running engines, machines, etc. The supply air may also be pulling a significant amount of airborne dust from the surrounding environment, such as in dry or desert areas that could make its way into the system and the office space.
- Evaluate the office space for signs of water damage or mold.
- What is the air quality in the area where the office is located? What about the days when people are reporting symptoms?
  - [Airnow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov) is a good resource to check the general air quality in your specific area at any given time.

# Safe**ALERT**<sup>SM</sup>



ORCIG 2020 SafeAlert Series



Other general things to look for:

- How sealed is the office space from the outside air?
  - If the air handling system is not correctly balanced, there's a possibility it could be pulling in more outside air and contaminants that are not getting sufficiently filtered before they enter the workspace.
- If easily accessed, are the duct connections at the supply registers properly sealed?
  - Dust and unfiltered air can make its way in around these areas if not adequately sealed.

While some of the general areas listed here can be checked by the untrained individual, it is in no way a substitute for bringing in a trained HVAC professional to evaluate the systems properly to determine if a hazard is present. Should you have any further questions, please contact your Safety Specialist.

**References:**

[https://www.assp.org/news-and-articles/2020/07/08/how-ventilation-can-help-improve-worker-health?utm\\_source=MagnetMail&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=gmeyer1@orcig.com&utm\\_content=ST%20%2D%20Standard%20Update%207%2D16%2D20&utm\\_campaign=standards](https://www.assp.org/news-and-articles/2020/07/08/how-ventilation-can-help-improve-worker-health?utm_source=MagnetMail&utm_medium=email&utm_term=gmeyer1@orcig.com&utm_content=ST%20%2D%20Standard%20Update%207%2D16%2D20&utm_campaign=standards)

