

## Bad Air Day?

In general, OHSU buildings consistently provide filtered, comfortable, and healthy air. However, several factors can affect the air quality of our environment. If you've ever experienced strange odors or mild irritation and allergy-like

symptoms, you may have had a "Bad Air Day." The following will provide guidelines and tools to problem-solve many of the frequently asked questions.

### What is Indoor Air Quality?

Employees should expect their workplace to provide a reasonable degree of comfort and air quality addressing both physical hazards (illumination, temperature, ventilation) and health hazards (chemical and bioaerosol exposures). Buildings are maintained to provide a level of comfort acceptable to most occupants. Achieving a balance of the many factors affecting air quality can be complicated and can occasionally fluctuate.

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### Shared Successes

The following are interesting progress notes from SafetyTeam members' activities:



- Core Lab employees requested fire safety and evacuation education—this will be presented at a staff meeting.
- A SafetyTeam member noted shrubbery causing a safety hazard near a parking structure exit. The Grounds crew has finished pruning for increased visibility.

If you have any safety concerns or questions, please contact the SafetyTeam Coordinator at 503.494.7319 or [safeteam@ohsu.edu](mailto:safeteam@ohsu.edu)

**Thanks members... be safe!**

### Safety Committee

Do you have a project for the Safety Committee to consider? Let us know! Email [safeteam@ohsu.edu](mailto:safeteam@ohsu.edu) with your comments and suggestions.



## Topic of the Month

This month's specialized training topic is a discussion of

### Fire Code Compliance.

This information has broad application to all OHSU buildings.



Periodic inspections of OHSU buildings are conducted by both internal resources and the City of Portland for compliance with state and federal fire codes. Inspections can lead to the identification and correction of conditions that might otherwise lead to loss of life and fire damage to OHSU property.



The following is a brief checklist of rules that must be complied with. Problems with any item should be reported to Facilities Management at 503.494.8054:

- ❑ **Suite and office numbers must be clearly posted in visible locations.** This applies primarily to entrances and main areas.
- ❑ **Exit-ways, stairways, fire escapes, pull stations, and fire extinguishers must be free from obstructions.** Do not block access to or use these areas for storage.
- ❑ **Exits must be clearly marked, and illuminated EXIT signs must be maintained.** Burned out bulbs need to be reported ASAP.
- ❑ **Fire doors must be self-closing and must freely latch upon close.** Fire doors help minimize damage in case of fire and are identified by the flame decal at the top of the doorframe..
- ❑ **Wedges and door stops must never be used on fire doors.** These defeat the safety function of self-closing doors and are often accidentally left in place. This applies to anything used to keep a door open—we've seen chairs, washcloths, and even a refrigerator!



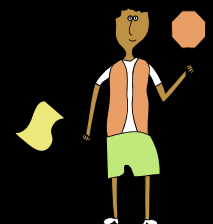
- ❑ **Extension cords are only allowed when their use is intended to be temporary and never overnight.** Extension cords are a primary source of fires, as well as trip and fall hazards. Use only medium- or heavy-duty cords when the need arises. Multiple-outlet power strips are acceptable if they are UL-listed, utilize 15-amp circuit breakers, and are a maximum of 15 feet long. Only use "Hospital Grade" power strips in outlet plugs with green dots on them.



- ❑ **Electrical boxes and switches must have intact and undamaged cover plates installed.** Cover plates confine any wiring problems to the safety of the junction box.
- ❑ **All electrical panels must be unobstructed and within easy access.** Thirty inches (30") of clearance must be maintained in front of electrical panels. If a panel is located in a closed room, signage must be displayed on the door.
- ❑ **Fire extinguishers must be serviced annually.** OHSU provides this annual service on all required units. In addition, the Joint Commission requires all fire extinguishers in healthcare areas to be inspected monthly. This task is performed by OHSU staff.
- ❑ **Combustible material (things that can burn) may NOT be placed closer than 18" to the ceiling in areas with fire sprinklers.**



Questions?  
Need Training?  
Call Environmental Health  
& Radiation Safety at  
503 494 - 7795



## Do you smell something?

Even when ventilation systems are working properly, odors are unavoidable. Humans can smell odors in extremely small amounts, but noticing an odor does not necessarily mean the odor is harmful.



These unpleasant smells can come in from the outside (a truck idling near an air intake vent) or the inside (your coworker heating up their



tuna casserole leftovers at lunch). Most of the time, these odors will dissipate as the air handling systems bring new air into the building. If you notice an odor, allow the building ventilation system 10-15 minutes to take care of it. During this time, put on your detective hat and look around for a source of the odor. A stinky smell can be caused by a full garbage can, soiled carpets, new furniture and equipment, or – a frequent offender – a rotten orange! As oranges begin to break down, they can emit a solvent/chemical smell. If your concerns about the odor persist after 10-15 minutes and you cannot locate or easily eliminate the source, call Public Safety Dispatch at **503.494.7744** to report. Please give the dispatcher as much information as possible; be sure to describe the smell (sweet, solvent, gas, etc) and the length of time the smell has been noticeable.

## Are you allergic to work?



Indoor air quality concerns can result in people reporting that their work area is causing irritation or allergy-like symptoms. Often, it is difficult to determine the exact source of the irritant, or even if indoor air is the problem. Weather and seasonal changes cause challenges for the building systems to keep up constant temperatures and air-flow. Indoor humidity is affected by outdoor humidity. These same conditions can challenge our immune systems, require outdoor air advisories, and affect our home air quality. Also, some people are more sensitive to odors and environmental conditions, both indoors and out. Indoor air problems can sometimes be difficult to detect; the symptoms they produce can be vague; and sensitivity is variable - each person may react differently.

## What happens next?

Public Safety triages concerns to Facilities personnel and Environmental Health & Radiation Safety (EHRS). Both groups have access to sophisticated monitoring equipment that can measure your air and how it varies throughout the day. Temperature, ventilation, humidity, illumination, cleaning schedules, and chemical storage are just a few of the factors that can be evaluated. Know that even with diligent investigation, identifying the combinations of factors that triggered a concern may not be possible and reasonable efforts for resolution may not completely eliminate all unpleasant odors. However, EHRS can provide guidance about how to feel more comfortable while at work.



## New Laboratory Safety Training Course Available



OHSU has developed a short online class to provide lab safety training. More than 100 people have already

completed the course! The lab safety course is part of a new course, General Safety and Laboratory Safety, that was developed for all OHSU personnel. The Laboratory Safety portion of the course is intended for those who work in research labs. Laboratory safety training is required by the OSHA Laboratory Standard, and by OHSU policy. Recently, federal and local agencies such as the NIH, OSHA, the DEQ, and even local fire marshals have begun to require that all workers have documented safety training, and this system helps provide that documentation. Please visit the [Big Brain System](#) to access the General and Laboratory Safety course.

**Questions?** Contact the OHSU Integrity Office at 503 494-8849 or [oieduc@ohsu.edu](mailto:oieduc@ohsu.edu). Questions on the course content or requirements can be directed to Debra Brickey at 503 494-0655 or [brickeyd@ohsu.edu](mailto:brickeyd@ohsu.edu) & Gwynn Daniels at 503 690-5312 or [danielsg@ohsu.edu](mailto:danielsg@ohsu.edu) in the Environmental Health & Radiation Safety Office.