

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

OHSU Facilities works hard to provide filtered, comfortable, and healthy air. However, several factors can affect the air quality in our environment. If you've ever smelled strange odors or felt mild respiratory or allergy-like symptoms, you may have had a "bad air day." This article may answer some of your questions and provides guidelines to help you problem-solve your situation.

What is Indoor Air Quality?

Employees can expect a workplace with a reasonable degree of comfort and air quality in terms of both physical hazards (illumination, temperature, ventilation) and health hazards (chemical and germ exposures). Buildings are maintained to provide a level of comfort acceptable to most occupants, and indoor air quality is a component of that comfort. Achieving a balance of the many factors affecting air quality can be complicated.

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. Unpleasant odors can come a number of sources including those outside (truck or helicopter exhaust getting into an air intake) and inside (fragrance, office supplies, and even tuna casserole leftovers at lunchtime). Most of the time, these odors will dissipate as the air handling systems circulate air and

bring fresh air into the space. If you notice an odor, you should allow the building ventilation system 10-15 minutes to get rid of it. During this time, you may choose to put on your detective hat and look around for a source of the odor. Particularly stinky smells can be caused by a full garbage can, soiled carpets, new furniture and equipment,



or – a frequent offender – a rotting orange peel! (As oranges begin to break down, they can emit a solvent/chemical smell.) If your concern about the odor persists after 10-15 minutes, and you cannot locate or easily eliminate the source, report it by calling Public Safety Dispatch at **503 494-7744**. Give them as much

information as possible; be sure to describe the smell (sweet, solvent, natural gas, etc); and note the duration the smell has been noticeable.

What happens next?

Public Safety triages concerns to Facilities or building management personnel and to Environmental Health & Radiation Safety (EHRS). These groups will work to assess the risk, identify the source, and resolve the issue. On the rare occasion that immediate action is required, these are the groups to manage the situation.

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Topic of the Month:

SLIPS, TRIPS, and FALLS

Slips, trips and falls happen more often than they should at OHSU, and these accidents can create serious injuries, cost money to treat, and take weeks or months to heal. All of this can prevent you from living the life you want. Most of these accidents can be avoided if you are alert to potential hazards. The following tips can help keep you healthy.



SLOW DOWN – Trips and falls occur most often when people are in a hurry. Short cuts are often the culprit! We all have tried to jump over something instead of walking "the long way around" to our destination. Learn to slow down and avoid potentially hazardous short-cuts.

WEAR GOOD SHOES – Walkways and walking surfaces at OHSU vary in slope and surface texture. Shoes with slip-resistant soles and a flat heel will reduce the chances of a fall. Be aware of the kind of terrain you'll be covering throughout the day and plan accordingly.

PAY ATTENTION – Watch where you are walking. Learning to recognize and avoid hazards saves time, money, and injuries. Areas not designed for foot traffic often consist of unstable, shaky, or slippery surfaces.

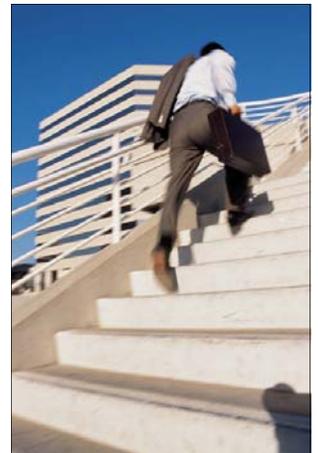


CLEAN UP SPILLS – Wet or slippery surfaces sometimes don't appear dangerous until you walk on them, and then it's too late. Clean up all spills, including liquids and solids or powders, as soon as you notice them. If it's not your area, please notify someone who can clean it up.

WALK SAFELY – If you have to walk on slippery or wet surfaces, take slow, short steps. Use handrails when walking on ramps and stairs. Also, take your hands out of your pockets in case you need them. Don't try to run, jump or slide across slick surfaces.

GOOD LIGHTING – Good lighting can help you spot hazards long before you get to them. Poor lighting can prevent you from seeing what is in the way. When you enter a dark room, always turn on the light even if you don't need to stay very long. Keep walkways clear of obstructions in areas that have lower light levels. Facilities and Real Estate (F&RE) can replace light fixtures or bulbs, as needed.

USE STAIRS SAFELY – It is easy to lose your footing when walking up or down stairs. Be cautious of worn or broken steps, and of lighting that might make it difficult to see properly. Never run up or down stairs, and avoid skipping steps. If you have to carry items while climbing stairs, be sure that your vision is not blocked. Try to keep one hand on the rail... it is often too late to grab it when you are falling.



STEP STOOL OR LADDER – When you need to get something from a shelf higher than your shoulders, use a step stool or ladder. Chairs are NOT meant for standing on and will almost always move when you do!

TELL SOMEBODY – Remember to report slips, trips and falls as well as near misses to [Risk Management](#) by way of [WSIRS](#) (Worker & Student Injury Reporting System for employees and students) or [PSN](#) (Patient Safety Net for patients and visitors).

SAFETYTEAM MEMBERSHIP

SafetyTeam Members spend approximately 15 minutes per month to help ensure a safe workplace at OHSU. Members receive a monthly email with a link to this newsletter and a few brief questions to answer.

Members then channel safety concerns from locations and departments all over OHSU to the SafetyTeam Coordinator, who then helps connect members with resources and when necessary, brings concerns to the OHSU Safety Committee.

To join, contact safeteam@ohsu.com or 4-7795.



Take a Deep Breath (cont'd)

Some air quality concerns have more complex origins, and further study is required. EHRS has monitoring equipment that can measure the environment, including how your air quality varies throughout the day, temperature, ventilation rates, humidity. Factors such as how the space is used, occupant activities, pressure relationships, building materials, and cleaning schedules can complicate assessments.

Weather and seasonal changes cause challenges for the building systems to keep up constant temperatures and airflow, and indoor humidity is directly affected by outdoor humidity. These changes can challenge our bodies to compensate, and some people report resulting respiratory or skin irritation and other allergy-like symptoms. It is sometimes difficult to determine the exact cause or even if indoor air quality is the problem, and sensitivities vary from person to person. Even with thorough investigation, identifying all the factors that may have triggered a given symptom may not be possible.

Everyone should do their best to be healthy and comfortable—stay hydrated, eat a good diet, dress in layers, apply lotion to dry skin, make good use of your rest breaks, and get some exercise every day.

FLU RESOURCES AT OHSU

There is one place on the web where employees at OHSU can find the official answers to their myriad flu questions. When in doubt about information on the Flu at OHSU, we can go directly to:

<http://ozone.ohsu.edu/flu/>

This page displays links to Staff News as well as eSTAT, These get updated regularly. You can count on the latest news, from visitor restrictions to vaccination information and more.



For a current issue of SAFETYNEWS online, and for archives, visit:

<http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/about/services/integrity/ehrs/safety/gen/safetynews.cfm>

The SAFETYTEAM page is available at:

<http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/about/services/integrity/ehrs/safety/gen/safeteam.cfm>

These pages are updated regularly. Send suggestions to the SafetyTeam Coordinator at:

safeteam@ohsu.edu

**Questions? Contact
Environmental Health &
Radiation Safety:
503-494-7795**

