



# TDCJ Risk Management's Training Circular

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## August Indoor Air Quality Breathing A little Easier

All of us face a variety of risks to our health as we go about our day-to-day lives. Refueling our cars, working outdoors (such as with the Field Force or in the Agriculture Department), running, driving or flying to meetings, and engaging in recreational activities can expose us to varying degrees of environmental pollutants. Some risks are simply unavoidable. Some we choose to accept because to do otherwise would restrict our ability to lead our lives the way we want. And some are risks we might decide to avoid if we had the opportunity to make informed choices. Indoor air pollution is one risk that you can do something about.



In the last several years, a growing body of scientific evidence has indicated that

the air within homes and other buildings can be more seriously polluted than the outdoor air in even the largest and most industrialized cities. Other research indicated that people spend approximately 90 percent of their time indoors. Thus, for many people, the risk to health may be greater due to exposure to air pollution indoors than outdoors.

In addition, people who may be exposed to indoor air pollutants for the longest periods of time are often those most susceptible to the effects of indoor air pollution. Such groups include the young, the elderly, and the chronically ill, especially those suffering from respiratory or cardiovascular disease.

Because so many Americans spend a lot of time in offices with mechanical heating, cooling, and ventilation systems, there are a lot of things



that can be done to improve indoor air quality so you can breath a little easier.

- \* Do not block air vents or grills.
- \* Water and maintain the office plants properly.
- \* Dispose of garbage promptly and properly.
- \* Store food properly.
- \* Avoid bringing products that could release harmful or bothersome odors or contaminants, such as air fresheners or candles.
- \* Place office furniture and equipment with air circulation, temperature control in mind.
- \* Report leaking faucets for repair
- \* Ensure windows are sealing properly.
- \* Monitor general housekeeping.



So before you walk out of

your office for the day, take that extra minute to look around, and remember the indoor environment problems are preventable and solvable. If suspect problems with the air quality in your office, contact the supervisor or building management.

### *Asbestos Awareness*



What is Asbestos? Asbestos is a naturally occurring, flexible, fibrous mineral that is noncombustible, lightweight and resistant to chemical treatment. These characteristics made it an ideal material for thousands of construction materials. Asbestos containing building materials can be found in Agency buildings in the form of acoustical plaster or texture, joint compound, pipe and boiler insulation, HVAC duct insulation, resilient floor tile, cementations siding, ceiling tile, roofing tile, gaskets and construction adhesives.



TDCJ units and housing areas in Regions I, II, III and VI are more likely to have asbestos containing building materials present, due to the age of these facilities.

### *Health Effects*



Asbestos, when damaged, splits into microscopic fibers that can float in the air for a long time. This means that inhalation is the most common route of exposure. There is no known "safe" level for asbestos exposure. Each exposure increases the potential risk of developing an asbestos related disease. There are no early warning signs and the effects do not appear for 20 to 40 years after the first exposure.

Lung cancer, asbestosis and mesothelioma are the three major asbestos-related diseases. Asbestosis is an irreversible chronic, lung scarring, non-cancerous disease that may cause respiratory or heart failure.



Mesothelioma is a rare, fatal cancer of the chest and abdominal membrane linings. Virtually all cases are directly linked to asbestos exposure.

### *Asbestos Management Program*

Asbestos containing building materials, when intact and undisturbed, pose minimal risk. To prevent staff, offenders and visitors from being exposed to asbestos containing building materials in Agency buildings, Facilities Division Region I Maintenance performs initial inspections of unknown building materials in support of Preventive or Corrective Work orders, Major Work Requests or outside Contractor projects.



Identified asbestos sites are reassessed biannually to monitor their condition until such time as those materials are removed by the Region I Maintenance Asbestos Abatement Team. For additional information on Asbestos Awareness, please contact Randy Hall, Asbestos Consultant Facilities Division at (936) 437-7245.

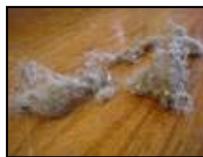


### **Dust**

Have you ever heard that dust is a Southwestern accent or have you spent a weekend dusting the house just to find that 2 days later it needs it again? So we stand there scratching our heads saying, "Where does this dust come from." **Dust** is a general name for a minute solid particles with diameters less than 500 micrometers. Dust in homes, and offices, and other human environments consists of human skin cells, plant pollen, human and animal hairs, textile fibers, paper fibers, minerals from outdoor soils and dust, and many may be found in the local environment. The quantity and composition of house and office dust varies greatly with seasonal and environmental factors such as the surroundings, exchange of outside air, age of the building, building materials and their condition, and the quantity of furniture and carpets, as well as their state of preservation. It also varies further with ventilation and heating systems, cleaning habits, activities of the occupants. The dust in your homes and offices can be removed by many methods, including wiping, swiping, or sweeping by hand, or with a dust cloth, sponge, feather duster, or



broom, or by suction by a vacuum cleaner or air filter. Did you know that the accumulation of dust in your computer creases, openings and ports can cause your computer to overheat and become unusable. Remind yourself on a weekly basis to look and clean your computer. If you don't keep your computer clean, you may have to handwrite things like the old days-before spell check! Have you looked in the corner of your office, or unit hallway storage closet, or even under your bed and starting screaming "I'm being attacked by **DUST BUNNIES**". Dust bunnies are little clumps of fluff that form when sufficient dust accumulates. You get brave and grab the vacuum cleaner out of the closet and wipe out the dust bunnies, now you can breath a little easier.



### **Mold**

Molds can be found anywhere, it can grow on virtually any

organic substance, as long as moisture and oxygen are present. There are molds that can grow on wood, paper, carpet, foods, and in-



sulation. When excessive moisture accumulates in a building or on building material, mold growth will often occur, particularly if the moisture problem remains undiscovered or unaddressed. It is impossible to eliminate all mold and mold spores in the indoor environment. However, mold growth can be controlled indoors by controlling moisture indoors. Moisture buildup inside of buildings may arise from water from plumbing leaks to condensation due to improper ventilation or ground moisture penetrating a part of the building. In areas where materials like paper, wood, including dry wall become moist and fail to dry within 48 hours, mold can propagate and release allergenic spores into the air.



To help with reducing mold issues in your building or units, note these deficiencies on your A.D.1020 inspection sheet so these deficiencies will be repaired by the unit maintenance department or building management for repairs.



### *Scented candles in the Workplace*



The results of recent indoor air quality surveys have shown that there is a dramatic increase in the use of scented candles in the workplace. These have been seen in congested office environments, industrial areas and even classrooms. Often they placed into a workplace to "improve" the odors found in the area. While they may improve overall odors by inserting a little cinnamon, vanilla, or citrus odors into the space, they really function by 'masking' the initial odors and don't address the original problem. The National Fire Protection Association in accordance with the Texas State Fire Marshal's Office prohibits candles, incense or other open

flame devices in TDCJ offices, besides the potential for fires. The air quality can trigger a reaction for people with upper respiratory or other types of breathing problems.

### *Air Fresheners*

Advertisements strive to make us feel that we do not have a clean office or home unless "air fresheners" are supplied in the areas generally to assure that we and our visitors are persuaded that our area is clean but also with elegant touches. Although it may smell nice for a while we are only covering up the real problem. Simply keeping the house, office or unit clean and well-ventilated solves most of the problems. Practicing good housekeeping rules keeps the area smelling good. We have to realize that "Clean" does not have a scent.



*Which one of these is better for your health and air quality?*

Clean really has a very "neutral" smell, it is non-offensive and non-toxic to



those with breathing problems. If you really want to freshen the area -

*Open some windows and  
breathe a little easier.*



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