

## Symptoms and Complaints Typically Related to IAQ Problems

Groups that may be particularly susceptible to the effects of indoor air contaminants include, but are not limited to:

- Allergic or asthmatic individuals
- People with respiratory disease
- People whose immune systems are suppressed due to chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or diseases from other causes
- Contact lens wearers

The effects of IAQ problems are often non-specific symptoms rather than clearly defined illnesses. Symptoms commonly attributed to IAQ problems include headache, fatigue, sinus congestion, cough, sneezing, dizziness and nausea. All of these symptoms, however, may also be caused by other factors, and are not necessarily due to air-quality deficiencies.

“Health” and “comfort” are used to describe a spectrum of physical sensations. For example, when the air in a room is slightly too warm for a person’s activity level, that person may experience mild discomfort. If the temperature continues to rise, discomfort increases and symptoms such as fatigue, stuffiness and headaches may appear.

The term, Sick Building Syndrome (SBS), is sometimes used to describe cases in which building occupants experience acute health and comfort effects that are apparently linked to the time they spend in the building, but in which no specific illness of cause can be identified. The complaints may be localized to a particular room or zone, or may be widespread throughout the building. Many different symptoms have been associated with SBS, including respiratory complaints, irritation and fatigue. **Analysis of air samples often fails to detect high concentrations of specific contaminants.** The problem may be caused by any or all of the following:

- The combined effects of multiple pollutants at low concentrations
- Other environmental stressors (e.g., overheating, poor lighting, noise)
- Ergonomic stressors
- Job-related psychosocial stressors (e.g., overcrowding, labor-management problems)
- Unknown factors
- Building Related Illness (BRI) refers to illness caused by exposure to the building air, where symptoms of diagnosable illnesses are identified (e.g., certain allergies or infections) and can be directly attributed to environmental agents in the air. Legionnaire’s Disease and hypersensitivity pneumonitis are examples of BRI that can have serious, even life threatening, consequences.
- A small percentage of the population may be sensitive to a number of chemicals in indoor air, each which may occur at very low concentrations. The existence of this condition, which is known as Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), is a matter of controversy. MCS is not currently recognized by the major medical organizations, but medical opinion is divided, and further research is needed.