



# Schools & Indoor Air Quality

A Manageable Risk

Presented to:

HIGH PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS

*Design and Technologies Seminar*

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Rebuild America/Energy Smart Schools

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# The Problem

- Approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population spends its days in our elementary and secondary schools
- US Department of Education reported that approximately one in five U.S. public schools had unsatisfactory IAQ
- Students are particularly at risk for health problems such as asthma and allergies



# Schools With Poor IAQ

- May experience:
  - Increased individual short-term health problems
  - Long-term health problems
  - Increased teacher turnover or shortages
- These schools may have to shut down and relocate staff and students to temporary facilities
- Poor IAQ may even lead to liability claims and lawsuits that can damage a school's reputation



# The Solution is Communication





# Why Is it Important to Communicate?

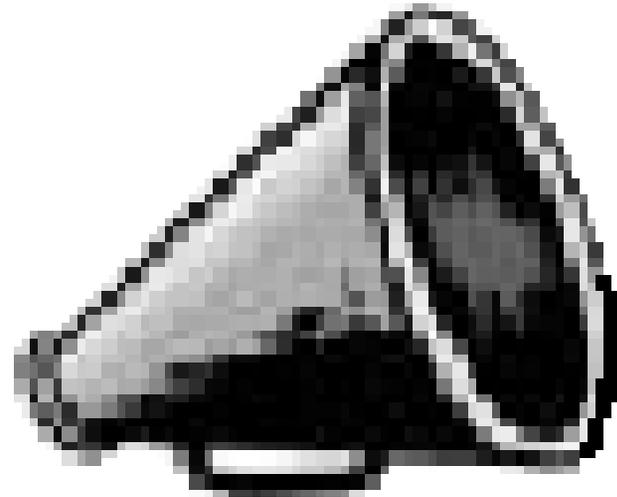
- Improve Health and Comfort
- Gain Support from Administrators and School Board
- Strengthen Community Relations
- Reassure School Staff, Parents, and Students





# What to Communicate?

- **Communicate your initial thoughts and concerns**
- **Promote your ideas as you roll out your IAQ Plan**
- **Advertise when you are implementing your management plan**
- **Highlight your successes after achieving your goals**





# How to Communicate Effectively

- Be honest and open about IAQ and its effects on health and comfort.
- Avoid technical jargon; provide clear, specific information
- Tell people what you can and cannot do.
- Emphasize actions; make the audience feel like they are part of the process.
- Be responsive; encourage feedback; be prepared for questions.
- Combat rumors with facts.
- Work *with* the media. Think of the media as a pipeline or conduit to a specific audience.
- Stay on the message of IAQ. Repeat the point you want to emphasize.



# Proactive Communication

- Proactive communication can:
  - Help prevent your school or school district from having to deal with negative press associated with full-blown IAQ problems.
  - Increases the awareness of IAQ issues, motivate teachers, staff, and students to get involved.
  - Create more support if by giving them some ownership of the program's success.





# Internal Communication for Staff

- Conduct presentations to discuss the school's IAQ program.
- Communicate your plans through internal brochures, pages in the employee handbook, internal newsletters, and fact sheets.
- Why the school is concerned about IAQ issues
- How the school plans to improve its IAQ
- What each staff member should do to get involved and help promote good IAQ.



# Internal Communication for Students

- Develop lesson plans and incorporate IAQ issues.
- Organize poster contests and educational games.
- Encourage students to assist in completing IAQ checklists, participate in informational meetings.
- Recognize students who participate in IAQ activities during school assemblies.





# External Communication for Parents

- Post news items on the school's or school district's Web site
- Send a direct e-mail to families to provide them with information on the dates, times, and locations of upcoming community meetings.
- Present updates at back-to-school night.
- Develop a handout or talking points for teachers to use at parent-teacher meetings.
- Invite parents to be part of the IAQ Team.
- Use the PTA as an effective outlet for distributing information and discussing IAQ issues with parents.





# External Communication for the Community and Media

- Write or place articles in your local or regional newspapers and magazines.
- Produce public interest features for your local news or cable access channels.
- Create print or audio public service announcements (PSAs)
- Share success stories of schools honored with an award in recognition of their IAQ improvements.





# Responsive Communication

- When schools and school districts are faced with an IAQ crisis it is critical to react quickly and honestly.
- With effective communication schools and school districts can turn a reactive, negative scenario into a positive and inspiring one.
- Crises also provide an opportunity to educate staff, students, parents, and the whole community on the importance of good IAQ.



# Internal Responsive Communication

- What the problem is and whether health effects have been reported or linked to the problem.
- How the problem will impact them.
- How the school's detailed plan will resolve the problem.
- What each staff member can do to ensure additional IAQ problems will not arise in the future
- How concise information will help staff members explain the impending situation to students.





# External Responsive Communication

- **First Cycle (0–12 hrs)**—The media wants to know “who” and “what” the crisis is about.
  - Release an initial statement to the press that confirms the facts, notes concerns, outlines actions for assistance and accountability, and sets a schedule for updated information.
  - Set ground rules for media coverage.
  - Offer contact names and sources for updated information.



# External Responsive Communication

- **Second Cycle (12–24 hrs)**—The media wants to know “why.”
  - Provide updated information and a schedule for more updates.
  - Offer experts to answer questions.
  - Have a few students or teachers speak to the press.
  - Share a plan to move ahead.
  - Dispel rumors firsthand.



# External Responsive Communication

- **Third Cycle (indefinite time line) —**  
The media wants new story angles.
  - Continue to give daily updates through news briefings or fact sheets.
  - Offer answers to questions as new information becomes available.
  - Show how agencies work together.
  - Continue to dispel rumors firsthand.
  - Set up tours of the school for media.





# IAQ Quiz !!!!



- EPA studies indicate that indoor levels of pollutants may be how many time higher than outdoor levels?
- The average person spends an estimated \_\_\_\_\_ percent of their time indoors?
- Mold is part of which of the five kingdoms?
- Communication is the key to \_\_\_\_\_?



# IAQ Quiz !!!!



- *Mold* and *mildew* are generic terms that are used to describe essentially the same type of \_\_\_\_\_?
- There are regulated exposure standards for molds and mycotoxins (T/F)
- In general, the colder the temperature at a surface the quicker mold will grow (T/F)



# IAQ Quiz !!!!



- What describes variable ill-health symptoms in buildings without specific cause?
- What basic factors constitute what is known as the “IAQ Triangle”?
- What are classified as physical stressors?
- Which category of human responses to contaminants and stressors refers to long-lasting responses as the result of frequently repeated exposures over an extended period of time?