

Prominent Consultant Shares Facts On Indoor Air Quality And Mold

By Deborah Childress

Florida employers and building owners concerned with indoor air quality and mold are challenged by an unregulated industry that can often conduct erroneous testing and remediation. To establish employee safety conditions and health reports, leaders need the facts about these issues, as well as the ability to discern a qualified consultant. Needlessly, some people are scared to death of these environmental culprits, while others may have been given a false bill of health.

Steven A. Lipson, CIH, CSP, FLAC, CIAQP, CIAQC is an expert witness, consultant and instructor regarding indoor air quality and mold. Co-owner and Director of Technical Services for Air Quality Consulting, Inc. of Brandon, Lipson conducted the indoor air quality assessment with re-occupancy of an office building located adjacent to the World Trade Center destroyed in September, 2001. He also was hired to perform anthrax samplings for an office high-rise building located in Boca Raton.

"Although buildings are constructed to be energy efficient, they tend to restrict air flow since they're built tighter," he explained. "This factor, along with poor construction can create moisture build-up, the culprit for mold."

But, building owners are often uninformed about the construction materials and/or methods used in their projects. "There is no legal responsibility established for general contractors or architects to disclose certain information," Lipson explained. "However, hiring a construction manager can help alleviate problems and ensure that construction is done correctly with expected materials properly installed."

Example: An 11-story Florida luxury resort hotel was constructed without oversight of a construction manager. No metal brackets were installed at any of the structure's right angles. Water seeped into the building and caused mold in every room. Even the drywall was decomposing. Open for only a few months, the hotel had to be completely renovated. Did everyone get sick? No. There is no hard, scientific evidence yet on the true health effects of mold. "We do know that people can experience allergic reactions - sinus problems, exacerbated asthma, eye irritation and hay fever. And, persons with compromised immune systems may experience more disease-related illness," Lipson said.

For indoor air quality, fresh air is critical but often disregarded when planning or rearranging the work environment. It dilutes the hundreds of chemicals released among congregated people that can cause headaches and other maladies. "The EPA found that over 70% of indoor air quality related complaints were associated with insufficient fresh air ventilation," Lipson explained. "Contaminant levels rise from crowded workspaces, and insuff-

icient or improper use of fresh air ventilation. Headaches are also caused by uneven building temperatures. These are the most common problems and simple to remedy. Only in rare instances are structural changes required," Lipson said space planning should always include a review of HVAC and building occupancy requirements.

"Indoor air quality and mold tests are often conducted by consultants from home inspection or asbestos fields, and can be incorrect due to insufficient scientific knowledge, incorrect data interpretation, or inadequate knowledge of all components comprising a complete test. Some do not conduct tests at the right time; when HVAC systems are working their hardest. Many firms also do not carry a Certificate of Insurance for mold. Only about a dozen Florida companies carry that. Others do not carry General Liability insurance. You cannot properly test a facility for mold exclusively by air testing, yet many consultants do this," Lipson said. "Proper mold testing requires a separate moisture survey and other protocols."

Richard Dalton, Environmental Sciences Manager for the Small Business Finance Division of GE Capital utilizes Lipson's services, and called on him regularly while serving as Allstate's Environmental Manager. "I've found it's much better working with an individual who is current on protocol, methodologies, state regulations and proper procedure", Dalton said.

Lipson says indoor air quality tests run about \$1,500 for a sizeable office facility while a concurrent mold inspection can be run at little or no additional cost. The company carries General Liability as well as Microbial Contaminant Consulting Insurance. For more information, contact the firm at (813) 571-9788.