

Indoor Air Quality

Get Some Fresh Air

Maintaining good indoor air quality (IAQ) is a crucial part of keeping Northwestern a safe, healthful, and comfortable place to work. It's important to understand what factors affect indoor air quality and how you can recognize potential issues. Some common culprits of poor indoor air quality include improper temperature and relative humidity, poor ventilation, water intrusion and mold growth, artificial fragrances, cleaning products, new furniture or carpets, and outdoor pollutants.

Northwestern maintains a healthy work environment in each of our more than 200 buildings by performing consistent preventative maintenance of all ventilation systems and maintaining conditions in accordance with established regulatory and industry guidelines.

There are some signs and symptoms that may indicate potential IAQ issues in your workplace, such as:

- Physical symptoms such as congestion, itchy eyes, shortness of breath, headache, or fatigue
- Musty or unusual odors
- Signs of water damage, such as damp carpet, stained walls or ceiling tiles, or bubbling and flaking building materials

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review how to recognize and report IAQ issues in your workplace and discuss ways to promote healthy IAQ conditions.

Stay Positive: Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

Share a Story, Ask for a Story: Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Reporting IAQ Issues

If you experience any general IAQ issues, notify your supervisor and contact [Facilities Customer Service](#). If you experience any health-related IAQ issues, please complete the [IAQ Survey Form](#), and an Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) team member will follow up with you within 48-hours. Call 911 for any immediate issues that pose a threat to public safety, such as a natural gas leak.



Temperature



Humidity



CO2



VOC

Indoor Air Quality Assessments

If you experience a health-related indoor air quality issue, EHS may assess the space and investigate the potential cause of the problem. Assessments will usually involve a visual inspection and measurement of temperature and relative humidity in the area. If necessary, air monitoring equipment will be used to assess concentrations of contaminants like carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Following an assessment, EHS will engage campus partners to address any issues identified.

You can learn more about indoor air quality on campus by reviewing Northwestern's [Indoor Air Quality Program](#) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) [Indoor Air Quality website](#).

Stay Fresh at Work

You can help promote healthy indoor air quality at Northwestern. Below are some useful tips to keep the workplace safe and comfortable for you and your colleagues:

- ✓ Keep your work areas clean and free of dirt and dust
- ✓ Notify your supervisor of any abnormal conditions, such as strange odors, stuffy air, or signs of water intrusion
- ✓ Maintain proper ventilation by ensuring air vents are not blocked by furniture or equipment, and keeping windows closed when using air conditioning
- ✓ Avoid using fragrances, such as perfume, cologne, or essential oils in your work areas

For Additional Information

Contact Environmental Health & Safety at ehs@northwestern.edu

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Environmental Health & Safety for details.