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Focus

Property Management

Air quality impacts vacancy level

From management functions like rent reviews, lease renewals and negotiations, to facilities management to general tenant relations, it all has to be done by a property manager — and it all has to be done now.

All that negotiating, repairing, and reviewing doesn't leave time for a breath, let alone time to think about the air that is being breathed in the property. Yet indoor air quality is a significant factor in a property's health and economic viability.

Some of the signs air quality may be affected in a building include:

1. health complaints of headaches, itchy, watery or burning eyes, breathing problems and/or drowsiness;
2. office is dirty or dusty;
3. air supply contains debris or black soil;
4. chemical smell;
5. complaints of stuffy or musty smells; and/or
6. humidity levels are above 60 percent or below 40 percent.

Nearly every commercial building has the potential for IAQ concerns. They range from the relatively minor — tenants complaining about temperature in a building — to the much more serious, like mold or chemical contamination. Yet any of



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the issues can have significant financial consequences including:

1. excessive maintenance calls;
2. deterioration of furnishings and equipment;
3. lower worker productivity;
4. strained relationships with tenants, possibly contributing to the loss of a tenant;
5. negative publicity that could put properties at a competitive disadvantage; and
6. litigation.

If a problem arises, CTL|Thompson's team of industrial hygienists can evaluate and recommend solutions. However, many indoor air quality concerns can be easily prevented with proper maintenance and forethought.

Consider the following:

■ **Building and equipment maintenance.** Often in older buildings, equipment is not maintained or operated as originally intended. Operating

instructions are lost, regular maintenance schedules forgotten and training neglected. A maintenance problem may go unnoticed until it causes a glaring problem.

■ **Energy efficiency.** Changes in building operations intended to save energy often create IAQ problems. Starting in the energy-conscious 1970s, buildings were built to restrict airflow to lower heating and air conditioning bills. Yet, when buildings don't "breathe," interior pollutants cannot leave the building as easily, make-up air may be reduced, and mold can become a problem if water is introduced, as the building will not "dry out" as easily.

■ **Tenant turnover.** As tenants move in and out, a number of problems can arise. First, an increase in employee count can impact air quality. This can raise the temperature, humidity, or carbon dioxide levels within the space, resulting in complaints.

Similarly, tenants may build out space without considering airflow. Even small changes such as the placement of interior room dividers or new office equipment can affect indoor air quality.

A change in use of a space also could result in tenant com-

plaints. Imagine a restaurant moving into a space neighboring a women's clothing store. If air intake isn't managed, the results could be very unhappy tenants.

■ **Installing new materials.** New carpeting, paint or furniture often emits chemicals into the air (called off-gassing). While the new materials are of great benefit, care should be taken to alert tenant to changes. Without proper notification, tenants may blame contaminated air on other factors, creating an environment of distrust. Proactive communication will help to avoid any issues.

■ **Air intake.** Air contamination can be a result of improper placement of air intake, or improper placement of materials around the intake. Sometimes nature can interfere — animal nests or landscaping can restrict air intake and create problems.

Most air quality problems are not difficult to correct and can be solved with an in-house maintenance staff. If there is a reason to believe that an IAQ problem could have serious health or financial implications, an investigation may be needed. ▲