

# CLEAN SPEAK

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THE ART AND SCIENCE OF CLEANING

## SICK BUILDINGS

Headaches, itchy eyes, dry skin, coughing, nausea - these are a few symptoms of “Sick Building Syndrome” (SBS). There are many causes of SBS, but the result is a decrease in productivity and an increase in absenteeism and presenteeism.

A person may be a victim of SBS if he or she is ill with no specific cause, and the symptoms experienced seem to be tied to a building, such as a person’s workplace. A building may be diagnosed as sick if many of its occupants suffer from a variety of illness symptoms that are not necessarily related, other than their connection to the building. One person may have chronic dry skin, while another may have repetitive sore throats, and yet another will have a nagging cough, but all may have the building to thank for their troubles.

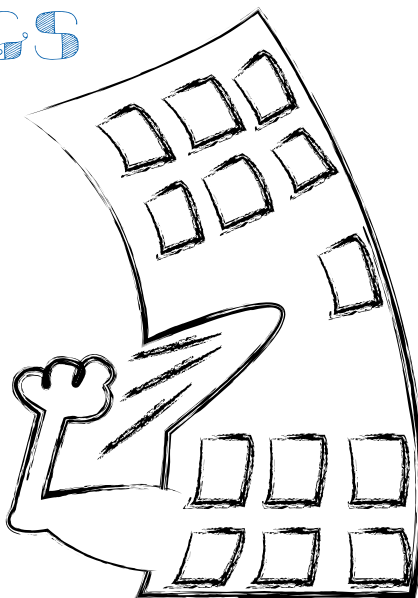
In the late 1970s, the term “office illness” was coined when strange illnesses started cropping up in new buildings. By 1986, when studying building indoor air quality, the WHO created the term “Sick Building Syndrome” to describe the wide range of symptoms they were seeing. Since then, there has been a great deal of research into the causes and treatments for sick buildings.

SBS has a number of causes, including:

**Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)** - VOCs come from thousands of sources. Over time, products that contain carbon and hydrogen based chemicals will gas out into the air, which can then irritate occupants’ eyes, nose, throat and respiratory system.

**Carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide (CO, CO<sub>2</sub>)** - An increase in CO and CO<sub>2</sub> may result from inefficient or old heating systems. Headaches, dizziness, weakness, and nausea are typical symptoms.

**Airborne particles** - Fibres from carpets and furniture, dead skin cells, dander from pests, and other small particles may become airborne during facility use or poor cleaning techniques, and then circulated by poorly maintained air ventilation. Allergic reaction type symptoms, and other respiratory issues may result from high levels of



this air contamination.

**Mould growth** - Unchecked water damage, and humidity create a ripe environment for mould growth, which in turn creates allergic type reactions.

**Dry air** - On the flip side, a building that does not have enough humidity will cause irritation to the skin, eyes and respiratory system.

If you suspect that your building may be sick, the first step is to perform a building evaluation that involves:

1. An occupant survey to determine overall health.
2. Based on the results, attack the most likely cause. In most cases, the ventilation system is at fault, but other sources should be evaluated, including the building’s cleaning chemical and cleaning tool choices. Cleaning technique is also extremely important. Depending on the suspected cause, an expert may be required to deal with the situation.
3. Once the suspected issue has been dealt with, perform an ongoing evaluation to see if occupant health issues decrease.

For a detailed assessment and resolution program, visit the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety website (<http://www.ccohs.ca>).

This could be a daunting task for a facility manager, but remember that W.E. Greer Ltd. is here to help. We can recommend cleaning tools, detergents, and cleaning techniques that help to improve air quality - just give us a call.

### Sources:

Health Canada - “Indoor Air Quality in Office Buildings: A Technical Guide” - <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/H46-2-93-166Erev.pdf>

Center for Occupational Health and Safety - “Indoor Air Quality” [http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/chemicals/iaq\\_intro.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/chemicals/iaq_intro.html)

EPA - “Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings” - [http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold\\_remediation.html](http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html)

# specials & spotlights:

Prices valid from Sept. 1 to Nov. 28, 2014 unless otherwise indicated. All items limited quantity.

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197101	Ice Breaker, 100 lb EZ Tote (18/pallet)	1-5	\$122.44	\$91.01
		6-17	\$108.70	\$83.53
		pallet	\$95.56	\$76.67
197124	Ice Breaker, 29 lb EZ Tote (75/pallet)	1-74	\$38.17	\$32.50
		pallet	\$35.30	\$28.18
197144	Mountain Organic, 22 lb. Bag (100/pallet)	1-5	\$22.30	\$15.28
		6-99	\$20.01	\$14.61
		pallet	\$17.74	\$13.19
197137	Arctic Blue, 25 lb. Bag (90/pallet)	1-10	\$17.47	\$13.70
		11-89	\$15.17	\$10.11
		pallet	\$13.89	\$9.78
190420	Winterinse - Floor Cleaner	3.98L	\$20.99	

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