



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

---

21 February 2004

### Gulp! Gasp!! Cough!!!

How many of you were dumbstruck when you walked into a corporate office? How many of you boast of working in a centrally air-conditioned atmosphere? Without doubt, this is a blessing to ward off the sweltering heat in our tropical land, but many of you fail to realize this is the reason for most of our respiratory problems.

Ever wondered why our parents used to insist on leaving a window open while asleep? The simple rationale, which we all know is true, is that fresh air endorses good health. The present culture does not permit us to open windows, day or night. Office buildings are sealed tight, which makes it impossible to catch a fresh breath. Hence, air is constantly recycled and this, in turn, leads to respiratory disorders and distress.

Common repercussions for inhaling inferior quality air are coughing, sneezing, breathlessness, nausea, dizziness, nasal congestion, fatigue, watery eyes, or headaches. What are the factors that contribute to the inferior quality of indoor airs? One possibility is volatile chemical vapors such as formaldehyde, asbestos fibers, carbon monoxide, or radon. It could also be common allergens like pollen, mildew, dust mites, airborne bacteria and virus, or mold.

Indoor quality of the air could be improved with the help of the following quick fix methods.

- **Cleaning ventilating ducts.** This is a stopgap method and provides a temporary reprieve. The chances are high the pollutants may dislodge and cause more damage than envisioned. A better option would be to change the filters every three months.
- **Ionizers and air cleaners.** Ionizers charge small pollutants and attach them to a collector. However, large particles escape the wrath of ionizers. They also fail in removing gases. Ozone is another air cleaner that can remove odors and pollutants in uninhabited spaces. This too comes with a drawback. The high levels that are required to make it effective are not safe for busy areas.

Another option is to fill the office space with ferns and philodendrons, which are nature's cleaning machines. Care needs to be taken as not to place over-watered plants, as they may house harmful bacteria.

- **Supplemental exhaust systems.** This enhances the availability of fresh air in confined spaces along with removing pollutants.
- **Oxygen breaks.** Letting the employees into the open air at regular intervals is another option, especially in a remodeled or newly furnished office. (At least this is better than having oxygen cylinders with masks and the rest of the paraphernalia at individual workstations.) However, this may not be all that conducive to smokers and people who want to quit.



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

---

- **Monitoring indoor smog.** Carbon monoxide detectors are inexpensive and easily installed. They would sound an alarm whenever the levels of CO go up. These would be especially handy when you have oil, propane, or kerosene heaters.

All these measures are fine on a temporary basis. The concrete measures that need to be adopted on a permanent basis may not be cost-effective. Small steps, however, make a giant leap!!