

Indoor Air Quality

Why This is Important

We spend about 90% of our time indoors, making it very important to ensure good indoor air quality (IAQ). Poor IAQ can lead to symptoms like headaches, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, trouble concentrating, and irritation of the eyes, nose, throat and lungs. Some exposures, e.g., to asbestos and radon, can even lead to cancer, and other serious health conditions, after many years.

Poor IAQ can cause and trigger asthma. In Vermont, of the more than 61,500 adults who have asthma, an estimated 34,900 are employed for wages or are self-employed, in addition to about 820 youths of working ages 16 and 17 (BRFSS 2021). Of these working Vermonters with asthma, about 53% (or 32,500) report that their current or former work caused or exacerbated their asthma. On average, adults with work-related asthma miss more than 10 days of work per year due to their asthma (ACBS 2021).

There are many easy, low-cost things employers can do to improve the indoor air quality in their worksites.

How to Support This Outcome

Education and Awareness:

- Use educational flyers, emails or other channels to share about the importance of preventive care and screening for chronic or preventable health conditions.
- Provide tobacco, vaping, and marijuana cessation educational flyers, including 802Quits.
- Educate employees on safer cleaning products and how to use them safely.
- Establish an environment where asthma control practices and programs are supported and valued.

Behavior Change:

- Encourage all employees to visit their primary care provider for annual well care visits.
- Train employees on asthma triggers and the impacts of individual behaviors (e.g., wearing scented products; using tobacco/vaping products on worksite grounds) can have on indoor air quality and health within the worksite.

Policy and Environmental Change:

- Prohibit tobacco, e-cigarettes, and marijuana use on all company property at all times (including all buildings, facilities and grounds).
- Establish and enforce a no-idling policy on company grounds.
- Establish and enforce a policy for a fragrance-free worksite.
- Establish and enforce a policy for using cleaning products that are safer for health and the environment. Purchase cleaning products that are third-party certified through EPA's Safer Choice, ECOLOGO or Green Seal.
- Use safer disinfectants like those certified by EPA's Design for the Environment or those that contain safer active ingredients like hydrogen peroxide, citric acid, ethanol, lactic acid or isopropanol. Avoid bleach and quaternary ammonium compounds.
- Establish a policy and train employees on proper procedures for reporting and responding to exposures, injuries or illnesses in the worksite.
- Establish policies and procedures for working safely during extreme weather events that may impact air quality, including wildfires, flooding, and extreme heat or cold.
- Establish and use integrated pest management (IPM) techniques to control pests.

Supporting Remote and Hybrid Employees:

- Provide a virtual option for educational opportunities and workshops.
- Distribute written information in a digital format to include those who work offsite.

Considerations for Employers of All Sizes

Whether an organization is small or large, taking simple actions can benefit the health of all workers and reduce asthma-related adverse impacts, including missed workdays. Here are two key actions employers can take:

- Have your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system inspected and maintained annually or according to manufacturer recommendations.
- Request a free, no penalty consultation from Project WorkSAFE.

Where to Go for Resources

- Vermont Department of Health's Asthma Program:
[HealthVermont.gov/wellness/asthma/asthma-triggers-secondhand-smoke](https://healthvermont.gov/wellness/asthma/asthma-triggers-secondhand-smoke)
- 802Quits: [HealthVermont.gov/wellness/tobacco/quit-tobacco-nicotine](https://healthvermont.gov/wellness/tobacco/quit-tobacco-nicotine)
- Radon: [HealthVermont.gov/radon](https://healthvermont.gov/radon)
- Mold: [HealthVermont.gov/mold](https://healthvermont.gov/mold)
- Vermont Department of Health's Envision Program: [HealthVermont.gov/envision](https://healthvermont.gov/envision)
- Informed Green Solutions (IGS): [InformedGreenSolutions.org/toolkit](https://informedgreensolutions.org/toolkit)
- EPA Indoor Air Quality: [EPA.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq](https://epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq)

- EPA's Safer Choice: [EPA.gov/SaferChoice](https://www.epa.gov/saferchoice)
- ECOLOGO: [UL.com/resources/ecologo-certification-program](https://www.ul.com/resources/ecologo-certification-program)
- Green Seal: [GreenSeal.org/splash/](https://www.greenseal.org/splash/)
- Quaternary Ammonium Compounds Factsheet:
[TURI.org/TURI_Publications/TURI_Chemical_Fact_Sheets/Quaternary_Ammonium_Compounds_Fact_Sheet](https://www.turi.org/TURI_Publications/TURI_Chemical_Fact_Sheets/Quaternary_Ammonium_Compounds_Fact_Sheet)
- Vermont Department of Health's Division of Environmental Health:
AHS.VDHEnvHealth@vermont.gov
- Vermont Department of Labor's Project WorkSAFE:
[Labor.vermont.gov/workplace-safety/project-worksafe](https://labor.vermont.gov/workplace-safety/project-worksafe)
- Vermont's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (VOSHA):
[Labor.vermont.gov/vermont-occupational-safety-and-health-administration-vosha](https://labor.vermont.gov/vermont-occupational-safety-and-health-administration-vosha)

For more info: The Vermont Department of Health is here to help. Contact the district office near you:
HealthVermont.gov/local