

# AFGE NEWS



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CONTACT: DAVID SCHLEIN  
(202) 347-3471

## GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE UNION CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

### TO PROTECT WORKERS FROM INDOOR AIR POLLUTION IN FEDERAL BUILDINGS

Washington, D.C. -- "Some working men and women, dedicated public servants, have seen their careers -- and their health -- ruined by indoor air-related illness," according to David Schlein, National Vice President of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) who testified today before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Natural Resources, Agriculture Research and Environment.

The Subcommittee is considering H.R. 1530, "The Clean Indoor Air Act of 1989," sponsored by Congressman Joseph Kennedy (D-MA). The bill is companion legislation to S. 657, similar legislation introduced in the Senate by Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME). Schlein voiced support in principle for the legislation, but emphasized the concerns his union has regarding the administration of a federal indoor air quality program.

Schlein cited results of a survey of federal and D.C. government employees sponsored, in part, by AFGE. The survey results indicate a widespread indoor air quality (IAQ) problem may exist in government worksites. Of the nearly 2,000 government workers who participated in the survey, more than 75 percent believe poor indoor air quality is a serious problem in their workplace. More than 90 percent of the respondents reported experiencing, on average, eight out of ten symptoms associated with building-related illness.

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AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AFL-CIO  
80 F STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001 / 639-6419 or 639-6423

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Based on the survey results and recent, well-publicized indoor air quality problems at the EPA and U.S. Information Agency headquarters, Schlein recommended that jurisdiction over the elements of the bill dealing with workplace indoor air quality should be shifted from the Environmental Protection Agency to the

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). "Because of OSHA's long-time and well-recognized expertise in occupational safety and health issues, we believe . . . the bill should stipulate that OSHA be responsible for all workplaces -- private, public and federal," said Schlein.

In addition, Schlein recommended that OSHA and EPA co-chair the proposed interagency Federal Indoor Air Quality Council. H.R. 1530 designates the General Services Administration (GSA) and EPA as co-chairs. "While regrettable, it is true that none of the federal agencies with responsibility for indoor air quality have thus far distinguished themselves. This is particularly true in the case of EPA and GSA."

There is general agreement within the scientific community that the primary cause of poor indoor air is improper or inadequate ventilation. Schlein testified that government managers often shut down ventilation systems during evenings and weekends, thereby contributing to indoor air quality problems. In addition, according to Schlein, "Government employees are more susceptible to IAQ problems than most workers since so many are overcrowded into workspaces, thus limiting the amount of fresh air available for each worker to breathe.

David Schlein is National Vice President of represents District 14 of AFGE, which includes the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area and represents a wide range of occupations including, clerical workers, attorneys, secretaries, program specialists, computer programmers, housing inspectors, emergency medical technicians, probation officers, licensed practical nurses and others. He has been a leading activist on the issue of indoor air quality because of its importance to federal and D.C. government employees.