

FEDERAL REPORT

Workers in poll blame air quality for sicknesses

By Dan Vukelich
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Forty-seven percent of federal employees locally are likely to have missed work because of poor indoor air quality, according to a union survey of 1,000 federal workers released yesterday.

Almost all survey respondents, 93.8 percent, claimed to have suffered ailments stemming from poor indoor air quality, and 59 percent believe their agencies aren't doing enough about the problem, according to the survey.

Three of four workers surveyed said they have experienced drowsi-

ness, which has been associated with poor fresh air ventilation, which leads to high carbon dioxide levels.

Other leading symptoms include sneezing and coughing, fatigue, headaches, eye or throat irritation, nausea and nosebleeds. All have been associated with indoor air contamination.

About 73 percent of the workers surveyed believe air quality where they work is "probably" or "definitely" a problem. More than half believe the air quality in their office makes it difficult to do a good job.

The survey was conducted by the American Federation of Government Employees and the National

Energy Management Institute, a trade association sponsored by the sheetmetal industry to create new sheetmetal jobs.

It was delivered in January and February to 18,000 union and non-union government workers at 27 agencies located in 47 buildings in the metropolitan area, said AFGE Vice President David Schlein.

Researchers compiled preliminary findings from the first 1,000 responses received, which came mostly from workers at the Department of Health and Human Services' Parklawn Building in Rockville, the Labor Department's Francis Perkins Building on Capitol

Hill and the Census Bureau's Federal Office Building 3 in Suitland.

Because the survey was not random, the results should be viewed "as suggestive of employee attitudes, but not conclusive on the subject," researchers warned.

Mr. Schlein said the survey provides for the first time "accurate information about the growing problem of poor indoor air quality in federal and district buildings."

Despite a 1986 commitment by the General Services Administration to clean indoor air, problems in many office buildings have only gotten worse, he said. "It is time for GSA to live up to their commitment."

Guy Boston, safety and environmental director for GSA, said agencies have primary responsibility for addressing indoor air quality complaints.

Mr. Schlein disputed that workers' complaints are being addressed by either GSA or the agencies.

"People are getting the run-around," he said.

"A typical scenario is that people get sick and complain, the agency promises to investigate but nothing happens. They don't want to recognize the problem."

Buildings with a history of well-publicized indoor air quality problems include the Environmental

Protection Agency's Waterside Mall headquarters, Columbia Plaza and the Library of Congress.

In the AFGE survey, 30 percent of the first 1,000 responses were from employees of the Department of Health and Human Services; 26.9 percent from the Labor Department and 19.6 percent work at the Census Bureau.

Buildings from which significant numbers of responses were received were: Parklawn, Francis Perkins, Suitland Federal Office Building 3, Scuderi, Suitland FOB 4, Bicentennial, Housing and Urban Development, General Accounting Office and Vanguard.

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