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Back-to-Work Ventilation-Related Checklist for OEHS Professionals

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We and those we work with will be going back to work or school sometime in the future. This checklist can help OEHS professionals provide safer workplaces and schools for those who will inhabit the buildings.

() Check in with the person in charge of the day to day operation of the heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) system, usually the “Building Manager,” the “Building Mechanic,” the “Service Manager,” the “Furnace Operator,” and so forth. Ask about the status of the HVAC system. For example: Is it running properly? What service does it need? Are its parts clean? Does anything need to be done to make the system work more effectively? Are the Plans and Specifications available for review, just in case? Is there anything else I should know?

() Be sure the HVAC system is on and running whenever someone is present in the building.

() Be sure the system fan is on and air is being moved through the HVAC system at all times people are present, even when the thermostats are not calling for heating or cooling.

() If necessary, set the fan to “On” or “Circulate” at the thermostat if the HVAC system does not provide a constant airflow all the time people are present.

() Check thermostats to be sure they are operating properly and set to the correct temperatures. Typical indoor temperatures are 68-74°F in the winter, and about 75-80°F in the summer.

() Check all supply and return grilles and registers to be sure they are open, operating properly and that air is flowing through them when the system fan is on.

() Set the outdoor air (OA) intakes or controls to the maximum level of fresh outdoor the system is capable of handling or providing. (This usually depends on weather, season, operating costs, etc.)

() Check OA intakes to assure that they are clean, open and not blocked by bushes, defective louvers, etc.

() Check system filters: Are they clean? Are they rated at the highest efficiency the system is capable of handling?

() For VAV systems, be sure the minimum airflow is set to the highest possible setting.

() Check system humidifiers to be sure they are clean, operating properly and providing an in-room relative humidity of about 40-60%.

() When using free-standing fan (e.g., pedestal fans, floor fans, wall fans, desk fans) to cool a person or to help mix the air in the space, try to avoid having the fan blow from one person directly past another.

() Check to be sure there are no water leaks or standing water in the building or HVAC system, e.g., in OA inlet plenums and return air plenums above ceilings.

() Check to be sure your HVAC system complies with local and state codes, standards and guidelines.

() Be sure the exhaust fans in restrooms are operating and that the restrooms are under “negative pressure.” (Airflow is always into the restroom and exhausted to the outside of the building.)

() Check kitchen exhaust hood ventilation systems to be sure they are operating properly and exhausting air to the outside. (There may be air recirculation in some kitchen exhaust systems that have very good filters.)

() If odors are present in a space or in the building as a whole, facility management or a consultant should be asked to check into it. Typical odor sources might include: garbage or trash, rodents or insect nests, stagnant water collected somewhere (e.g., in a wet carpet), rotting plants, spoiled food, mold growths in carpets or walls, dirty ductwork, and dirty kitchens or break rooms. Remove or control such sources.

() If odors are detected in, or coming from a space or room where chemicals are stored, check to see what the odor source is (e.g., a leaking storage container) and have the problem corrected.

() In the first few weeks, regularly check with occupants of the space to see if they feel comfortable with the environment and are not feeling ill in any way. Always follow up on any complaints or reported feelings of being ill or irritated while present in the building.