

Environmental and Occupational Allergens



Safety Gram

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“Safe and Healthful Working Conditions”

Many hazards can be seen and observed in the working environment. However, there are many harmful substances that we cannot observe. These substances can include dust, pollen, biological agents, and other allergens. Although these hazards are difficult to see, they can be harmful to health and personal wellbeing. It is estimated by the CDC that around 90% of doctor visits are allergy related. Below are things to consider about your working environment to combat allergens and stay healthy and safe at work.

There are a wide variety of workplace allergens that could potentially impact your employees, including:

- Animal dander and debris
- Food allergies
- Industrial chemicals — such as solvents, bleaches, and adhesives
- Latex
- Perfumes and odorants
- Pollen, dust, and molds
- Wood dust and resins

Safety Committee

The purpose of the Chemistry and Biochemistry Department Safety Committee is to help protect researchers, workers, and students in the department.

Please contact us with any questions, concerns, or suggestions about lab safety.

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Animal dander and debris are considered biological allergens and can cause such health effects as cough, dry throat, even asthmatic symptoms. They are very easily suspended in the air and can be very difficult to remove from the home and work environment.

There can be trace amounts of any of the above allergens in the air. Especially in a working environment such as the Chemistry and Biochemistry department where many chemicals and materials are used on a regular basis.

If you notice a significant increase in milder allergy symptoms in yourself or other around you in the workplace, look for possible causes. You might have an unidentified mold, fungus, or ventilation problem. And while many allergic exposures are unavoidable, some relatively inexpensive modifications might improve your workplace health.

For example:

- Run the office AC system during peak allergy season (typically the spring, when many Bay Area trees release pollen).
- Use HEPA air filters in the office and change them regularly, when possible.
- Take building maintenance and cleanliness seriously.
- Identify and repair water damage, reducing mold growth.
- Encourage employees to regularly clean their desks and workspaces, reducing the amount of dust, mold, and other irritants in the office.
- Remove carpet and other absorbent materials that might collect allergens, when possible. If there is an allergen problem in your workplace, there is a change the allergen source will remain and removing things like the carpet will only solve the problem short-term.
- Provide appropriate protective gear (such as respirators, gloves, and barrier creams) when employees handle industrial chemicals and other irritants.
- When possible, look for alternatives to common workplace allergens.

Symptoms of Mold Exposure

- Sneezing
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Itchy eyes, nose and throat
- Cough and postnasal drip
- Watery eyes
- Wheezing
- Cold and flu-like symptoms
- Shortness of breath
- Sinus congestion
- Chronic fatigue and weakness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Headaches and light sensitivity
- Skin rashes




Many people think they know their allergic triggers, but they are often wrong or don't distinguish between a trigger and an everyday occurrence. Misidentified allergies can lead to ineffective treatment, increased symptoms, and decreased workplace productivity. If you are struggling with serious allergies, try to seek treatment with an allergy specialist.