

Four Facts You Didn't Know About Pests and Indoor Air Quality

Mold, dust and pollen are not the only biological contaminants that negatively effect indoor air quality. Regardless of a building's size – from homes to high-rises – pests such as cockroaches, rodents and dust mites have a large impact on the air building occupants breathe and pose a serious public health threat.

1 How pests harm indoor air quality

Cockroaches and rodents are two of the most common pests that contaminate air. Pest allergens are especially dangerous for individuals with asthma because airborne allergens can trigger asthma attacks and other bronchial-related complications. Proteins in cockroach droppings, saliva and decaying body parts trigger allergies and can increase the severity of asthma symptoms. Proteins in rodent urine become airborne allergens and can cause illnesses such as influenza and measles. Rodent droppings can contain deadly diseases such as Hantavirus. Americans spend more than 90 percent of their time indoors and the US EPA cites pest allergens as one of the contributing factors to sick building syndrome.

2 High costs to public health

Pest-related allergens both cause and trigger asthma symptoms. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, more than one in ten Americans have asthma and that number is on the rise. Nearly 20 billions dollars are spent each year controlling and managing asthma symptoms as well as preventable hospital visits. Lost productivity from missed workdays and school absences largely contribute to the indirect costs of asthma. Children are especially susceptible to pest allergens. Multiple studies, including the National Cooperative Inner City Asthma Study, show children who react to pest allergens are many times more susceptible to asthma-related complications and costly emergency room visits.

3 Public housing residents are more vulnerable to pest pollutants

Inner-city residents have a disproportionate rate of asthma, especially among children and the elderly. In a 2006 study conducted by the New York City Housing Authority, 77 percent of apartments surveyed had cockroach infestations. The study concluded that pest allergens were affected by a variety of structural characteristics as well as building managers' and occupants' efforts to prevent or moderate pest infestations.

4 Improving indoor air quality using Integrated Pest Management

Relying on chemical pesticides and rodenticides isn't the only – or the most effective – option to control pest problems. Like pest allergens, multiple studies have linked pesticide exposure to asthma. Using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is safer and more effective. IPM is a prevention based approach to solving pest problems using common sense techniques with chemical pesticides only as a last resort. Removing sources of food, water and shelter for pests, and blocking entry points can eliminate or drastically reduce pest problems. Sealing cracks in foundations, installing sweeps to close the gap between door sills and the bottom of exterior doors and proper cleaning of hard-to-reach places under and behind food service equipment where food debris accumulates are relatively inexpensive and much more effective solutions compared to the cost of routine chemical applications!

Consider the mouse, which can squeeze through a gap a quarter of an inch in diameter. Without effective door sweeps on your exterior doors, heat and food odors are literally pumped outdoors, creating a beacon

calling all mice to warm shelter and delicious food each fall. University of Florida study results indicate you can reduce pest complaints overall by up to 65 percent just by installing and maintaining effective door sweeps. How's that for a return on investment!

For more information about pest allergens and Integrated Pest Management visit the Green Shield Certified website at www.greenshieldcertified.org.