

DO YOU WORK IN A TOXIN FACTORY?

The modern office is home to as many as 350 different volatile organic chemicals released by building materials, furnishings, and office equipment. That's not to mention the molds and bad indoor air that often flourish in these sealed-up environments. Some of the biggest offenders:

Printers and fax machines

They all ooze ozone. Scientists have yet to figure out definitively what happens when that ozone mixes with the workplace's other volatile organic chemicals.

Smoking

When people in your office sneak a smoke—even if it's behind closed doors—the second-hand stuff funnels through the ventilation system to the rest of the office.

Exterminators

It doesn't help that exterminators spray pesticides that may contain carcinogens over your workspace.

What fresh air?

Believe it or not, many fresh air vents are located over loading docks and parking garages, sucking in carbon monoxide and other contaminants.

Hidden Dangers: A Glossary

HVACs Heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems. Often they circulate contaminated air.

VOCs Volatile organic chemicals. They're emitted by furnishings, cleaning products, and equipment.

MCS Multiple chemical sensitivity. Sufferers are hypersensitive to chemicals.

CCP Carbonless copy paper. Found in credit-card and bank receipts. It contains known and probable carcinogens.

Sealed windows

Most people now work in enclosed offices. Not being able to crack open a window means that you're relying on building managers to pump through enough fresh air—something they don't always do.

Carcinogenic cleaning products

There are 70,000 chemical cleaning products on the market, many of which are used to clean up your office. Some of these products may contain carcinogens.

Copy machines

They also emit ozone. What's worse, they are not always next to vents, so their emissions stay trapped in the office air.

The office bathroom—the modern mold machine

Who hasn't seen a clogged toilet? Flooded bathrooms can create molds.

The stack effect

Co-workers who smoke may think they are doing you a favor by taking it outside. But experts say this can be even worse. When you open the revolving door, the building sucks in the second-hand smoke like a chimney.

Renovations

Working in a building—especially those with sealed windows—can cause workers to inhale paint fumes, construction dust, and odors from new furnishings that can irritate skin, eyes, and airways.



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