



MEMBER ALERT

School Environments

Indoor Air Quality

Students, as well as staff, spend a great deal of their time in the classroom and school setting. It is important that the environment is safe for its intended use and conducive to learning. With that in mind, the following information is offered to assist instructors and site administrators with creating and maintaining safe and healthful learning environments.

Air Fresheners/Essential Oils and Candles

Classrooms are subject to unusual, and sometimes unwelcome, odors. Classroom odors are often responsible for prompting instructors to install air freshening devices in order to mask the unwanted odor. Air freshening devices consist of plug-in devices, passive emitters, candles, diffusers and/or the use of aerosol sprays. SISC does not recommend the use of such items in the classroom.

Air fresheners are chemically based; therefore, it is hard to predict whether a person will have a respiratory sensitivity or other physical reaction, such as headaches. If air fresheners are being used in an attempt to control odors or mask “stale air”, consideration should be given to adjusting the ventilation system. When operating properly, the system should bring in enough outside air to keep odors under control.

The use of candles as air fresheners is dangerous and should never be allowed. The use of candles for this purpose, as well as other purposes, is a violation of both the California Building Code (Title 24) and the regulations of the State Fire Marshal (Title 19).

Some groups that may be particularly susceptible to effects of indoor-air contaminants include:

- Allergic or asthmatic individuals or people with sensitivity to chemicals.
- People with respiratory disease.
- People whose immune systems are suppressed due to radiation or chemotherapy, or disease.
- Contact lens wearers.

The best strategy in maintaining comfortable indoor air is not by introducing more “chemicals” but by providing properly functioning and operating ventilation systems.

Humidifiers/Diffusers

In addition to posing the same issues as other electrical appliances, humidifiers and diffusers also pose their own unique risks. Both distribute moisture in the air by pulling water through a filter which is subject to air movement by an internal fan. If the unit is not kept in a sanitary condition, the fan will force microbial growth or other contaminants into the surrounding air. This risk is wholly unnecessary given the overall ineffectiveness of such units in commercial environments (such as classrooms). Building codes require that a specified amount of outside air be brought into a space continuously while the space is occupied. Unlike a household environment where the air is continually re-circulated, a classroom environment is continually flushing out air and bringing in “new” air. This continual flushing makes any residential humidifier/diffuser ineffective.