

# Office workers need fresh air to stay productive

People who work in poorly-ventilated offices with higher levels of indoor pollutants and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) have significantly lower cognitive functioning which severely damages their productivity.



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Linda Trim, director at Giant Leap, said that good ventilation is often the last thing people think about in an office.

“But it should be far greater consideration when you realise most people who work spend 90% of their time indoors.”

She noted that when designing offices, people typically think about layout and the look and feel of the space.

But interestingly, as buildings have become more energy efficient, they have also become more airtight, increasing the potential for poor indoor environmental quality.

“While design and energy efficiency are of course important, little regard is given to air quality. If it isn't good, none of the other stuff matters because it diminishes worker productivity so much.

“It should no longer be an afterthought when you consider the high cost to businesses of having staff performing below

par.”

Trim cited an October 2015 study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Syracuse University which assessed indoor environment.

“The researchers looked at people’s experiences in which both the participants and the analysts were blinded to test conditions to avoid biased results.

“The findings suggest that in office spaces in which many people work daily could be adversely affecting cognitive function—and conversely, improved air quality could greatly increase the cognitive function performance of workers.”

These results suggest that even modest improvements to indoor environmental quality may have a profound impact on the decision-making performance of workers.

The same study also ran cognitive tests on people working in enhanced ventilation conditions and compared them to those working in elevated levels of carbon dioxide which replicated the typical workspace.

They found that cognitive performance scores for the participants who worked in the enhanced ventilation environments were, on average, double those of participants who worked in conventional environments.

Researchers found that the largest improvements occurred in the areas of:

- crisis response (131% higher in enhanced ventilation work places over conventional environmental with elected carbon monoxide)
- strategy (288% higher as above )
- information usage (299% higher as above)

“Our understanding and refinement of the best working environment is still developing however it is clear that poor ventilation has a marked effect on worker performance.

“Improved air quality is a simple yet very effective way to get more out of people and help them feel better and more energetic at the same time,” Trim concluded.

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