

The Environmental Protection Department Seeking To Safeguard Our Environment

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) of the Ministry of Energy and the Environment is the Government of Barbados's primary environmental monitoring and pollution control agency. The EPD was established in 1971, and was previously known as the Environmental Engineering Division. The change in name, which took effect in November 2004, was intended to better convey the EPD's function and its role as a regulatory agency. The new moniker is more reflective of the EPD's long-standing mission statement:

...to seek to promote sustainable practices through control, regulation and enforcement. In so doing the Department will enable future generations to inherit an environment which is healthy, productive and enjoyable.

The EPD's functions remain unchanged, with the Department being responsible for the monitoring and regulation of all conditions likely to affect the quality of land, air and water and the general environmental well-being of Barbados and its inhabitants. Duties include building development control, marine pollution control, asbestos abatement, water quality monitoring, hazardous materials management, and air quality control.

The monitoring of indoor air quality is one of the Department's major concerns, particularly as it relates to protection of the health of workers in the public and private sectors. The Air and Noise Pollution section of the EPD is kept busy responding to an increasing numbers of requests for inspections of buildings where workers are mainly suffering from irritation of the upper respiratory tract. The common symptoms reported include coughing, sneezing, sore throat and hoarseness. On investigation of these complaints, it has been observed that a number of the contributing factors can be eliminated by changes in the management of the working environment.

Routine maintenance of air-conditioning systems is essential in any office environment. Chronic problems can result from inadequately designed air-conditioning and ventilation systems, which do not provide adequate quantities of fresh air. These problems can be exacerbated by lack of maintenance of the systems. There is also a trend in newer

buildings to reduce the number of functional windows, or to do away with windows altogether, which means that there is no alternate source of ventilation in the event of a failure of the mechanical system. Modification of the office layout by erecting walls or partitions (after approval of the initial building design) can negatively affect air circulation. Indoor air quality problems can be intensified if an office ends up accommodating more people and equipment than was accounted for in the original design.

It is essential that daily janitorial cleaning be supplemented by regular industrial cleanings. Paper, old documents and equipment, if allowed to accumulate (without adequate storage) can harbour dust and encourage the growth of mould if ventilation is inadequate. The accumulation of dust and lack of thorough cleanings are some of the most common problems which have been identified during investigations by our office.

We strongly advise against the use of paints, pesticides or harsh cleaning chemicals while the building is occupied; sufficient time should be provided after the use of these substances to allow the building to “air out” and fresh air to circulate before people re-enter the office.

The EPD is working to abate the problems related to poor indoor air quality by inspecting buildings before they are occupied by Government departments. This allows us to assess the suitability of the accommodation for the proposed purpose and to make recommendations to nip potential problems in the bud. In addition, if the inhabitants of an office are experiencing problems, our officers will carry out investigations and assessments on request. However, the onus is on managers, building managers and to some extent employees, to ensure that conditions within the office environment are conducive to good indoor air quality.

Attention to the physical work environment is an important component of the public sector reform process. We believe that good environmental quality both in and out of the office contributes to the overall health, comfort, contentment and productivity of the nation’s workforce, and through our daily work the EPD is dedicated to helping to ensure that all workers in the public sector enjoy safer and healthier workplaces, as well as a safer and healthier natural environment.



Photo: from left Mrs. Nicole Sue, Senior Environmental Technician & Ms. Thérèse Yarde, Senior Environmental Technical Officer