

LIBRARY PROCESSING CENTRE

SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT

FEBRUARY 1986

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This report has been prepared in order to summarize some of the activities of the LPC Safety Committee in the last three years. We hope that by emphasizing the most important past issues, the LPC occupants will have a better understanding of potential safety problems involved and attempted solutions to solve these problems.

The Committee spent a great deal of time and effort in fact-finding, by conducting safety inspections, and trying to inform and educate the occupants of the building about workplace hazards.

The concerned occupants' complaints, with regard to unhealthy workplace environments, were channeled by the Committee to the authorities concerned. Their acknowledgement of problems in the LPC building was painstakingly slow in coming. However, the active participation and feed-back on the part of the occupants, and also the persistence of the Committee's secretary, resulted in the eventual recognition and veracity of many of the Committee's submissions.

Committee representation from floors 3 and 4 has been inadequate in the past and has fluctuated due to the heterogeneity of the tenants. It is only lately that it has stabilized. The Committee's experience widened as members from the upper floors presented problems unique to their working environments.

Constant complaints against cigarette fumes led the Committee to recommend designated smoking areas (staff rooms) and posting "No Smoking" signs in washrooms and elevators.

Twice we have received complaints on the intrusion of fleas and silverfish and, in both cases, the problem was successfully resolved.

During the past three years the LPC building has been inspected by a number of outside consultants. Most of these inspections were conducted upon request from the Committee as a result of occupants' complaints dealing with air circulation and heating.

Inspectors from Workers' Compensation Board; from the Ministry of Labour - Occupational Environment Branch; and the engineers and technicians from the UBC Physical Plant, responded to repetitive complaints, trying to find proper solutions. They carried out various tests, collected valuable data, and applied results of that data to partially solve some of the problems.

The inspections were also useful in revealing other important issues that the Committee had not been aware of. The outcome of the inspections was in many ways educational, both to the Committee and to the occupants of the building, enabling them to better understand the forces at work in an office air conditioning environment.

Although the inspectors could not produce the results that would radically change the unfavourable conditions and completely satisfy the building's tenants, they were remarkably helpful in deepening occupants' awareness of the complexities involved, and gave them a better understanding of factors contributing to negative environment conditions inside the building.

One of the most common complaints, cold air drafts, has been handled in a multitude of ways. It was the subject which kept coming on the Committee's agenda year after year. The complaints were more numerous during the change of outside temperature, discrediting air conditioning system adaptability to respond to changes of weather.

The enforcement of unobstructed ceiling diffusers had been eventually abandoned, and the occupants were allowed to tape off vents above one's workplace, in cases where one could not stand the draft. Judging by the decline in draft complaints, this was the right step that partially alleviated the problem.

Temperature, excessive heat or excessive cold, had usually been solved by phoning the Physical Plant desk to send someone to readjust the thermostat. Such action would occasionally disrupt other air diffusers, creating secondary drafts. This in turn would launch a second phone call to Physical Plant and another mark down of LPC popularity by the technician on duty.

It seems the occupants eventually realized that the deficiencies of the LPC air conditioning system could be improved by adjustment to a degree, but beyond that any further attempt at adjustment of the system created more harm than good.

The alternative - open windows - has been ruled out as too costly a venture and because of the countereffect it would have on the air conditioning system.

Although the majority of occupants' complaints during the last three years were related to the building working environment, the lack of statistically proven data and proper methodology, prevented the Committee from evaluating and acting upon such complaints. A fact-find survey, in the form of a questionnaire, could perhaps be the missing link which would confirm or disprove the extent of occupants' discomfort.

The "Sealed Office Syndrome" remains one of the most persistent of health complaints in the LPC. On several occasions paint and spray polluted the air in the building. Occupants were reminded that no spraying of any kind is permitted inside the building. In future, painting is to be done with an odorless paint variety. Health related complaints ranged from headache, respiratory system and eye irritation to drowsiness, stuffiness and stiffness. An increased intake of fresh air by the air conditioning system helped to combat pollutants and recycle stale air. Perhaps, the earlier limited supply of fresh air contributed to some of the air related problems. The increasing pressure efficiency and assembly line environment, may also have contributed to the complaints of discomfort.

Incorrect lighting, as a source of potential eye strain discomfort for VDT operators has been somewhat lessened by the introduction of detachable keyboards, subdued light sources and, more recently, the UV 400 eyeglasses being tested. Posture adjustable VDT chairs, when properly adjusted, also help relieve some of the discomfort when one is subjected to sit behind a VDT for a long period of time.

In many cases lack of funds has made it difficult to make meaningful changes as recommended by the Committee. Even some pressing issues have been kept on hold for months before necessary funds could be secured.

Owing to its role as a purely recommendatory body, the Committee's potential for effective change is limited, and thus it faces a constant uphill battle. The realization of this fact has perhaps contributed to the close cooperation among Committee members and has resulted in the Committee's modest accomplishments. Although the Committee members have not always found it possible to find adequate solutions, the members came away from the discussions at the meetings with a much deeper understanding of the complex issues we had to address.