



Sick Building Syndrome & OHSAS 18000 (now ISO 45001:2018)

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Sick Building Syndrome - SBS

Introduction

- Sick Building Syndrome (also referred as Tight Building Syndrome) refers to situation wherein occupants of a building experience acute health related symptoms
- These symptoms are directly related to the time spent inside the building
- It is difficult to identify a specific illness or disease
- It is difficult to identify a specific cause for such an illness
- Sometimes, instead of the whole building, only certain areas within the building are the ones whose occupants complain of such symptoms
- Mostly reported in air-tight buildings or buildings with poor ventilation

SBS - Definition

- An illness affecting workers in office buildings, characterized by skin irritations, headache, and respiratory problems, and thought to be caused by indoor pollutants, microorganisms, or inadequate ventilation.
- Source: The American Heritage® Stedman's Medical Dictionary

OHSAS 18000 (Now ISO 45001:2018)

- OHSAS 18000 is a British Standard which describes the need to have a management system to take care of Occupational Health & Safety
- As of March-2018, it has been adopted as in ISO Standard under ISO-45001:2018
- It promotes a healthy working environment
- It provides a framework to:
 - Identify health and safety risks
 - Identify potentials for accidents
 - Controls for health and safety risks
 - Controls for potentials for accidents
- Implementation of OHSAS 18000/ ISO 45001:2018 shall help organizations to provide a healthy environment to its employees which will lead to better productivity

Industries vulnerable to SBS

- Earlier it was presumed that industries like tobacco, manufacturing and chemical were prone to reporting of sick building syndrome
- In today's scenario, in fact, most of the energy-efficient building housing corporate offices have been found to having reports of Sick Building Syndrome because
 - Energy efficient buildings have been concentrating more on insulation and prevention of loss of air-conditioning that these have become almost air-tight, thereby leading to poor intake of fresh air, poor ventilation and resultant poor indoor quality

Way Forward

- HR/ Admin should start monitoring reported sickness by employees with common symptoms like headaches, nausea, dizziness, dry cough, itching, cold etc.
- Multiple employees reporting similar symptoms or few employees frequently reporting such symptoms should be taken as an alert
- Have your indoor air quality checked at regular intervals
- As far as possible, follow ASHRAE[^] guidelines on Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) during design, project and operational phases
- If possible, implement ISO 45001:2018 in your organization

^ASHRAE: American Society for Heating, Refrigerating and Air-conditioning Engineers

End of Document

GACS

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