

## **Asthma Walkthroughs Sample Walkthrough Report**

### **Background**

Asthma is a chronic disease of the airways that causes recurrent and distressing episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and nighttime or early morning coughing. Exacerbations can be triggered by exposure to allergens or irritants, respiratory infections and exercise. The environment, both indoor and outdoor, plays an important role in the exacerbation of asthma symptoms in people who already have asthma.

There is substantial evidence that indoor environmental exposure to allergens and irritants play a role in triggering asthma symptoms. These allergens and irritants are found in schools. While several substances can trigger asthma symptoms, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) emphasizes five:

- Animals
- Dust mites
- Mold/moisture
- Pests
- Secondhand smoke

### **Minnesota School Walkthroughs**

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Asthma Program has developed a school asthma walkthrough checklist that focuses on low to no cost solutions for addressing environmental asthma triggers. MDH staff has conducted walkthroughs in both rural and urban schools in a variety of K-12 classrooms. The most common problems seen in the school environmental asthma walkthroughs were grouped into two categories shown below.

#### **Common Building Related Problems**

- Carpet next to moisture sources such as sinks and drinking fountains
- Ceiling stains: evidence of moisture
- Entrances without walk-off mats
- No school bus idling policy
- Common pests: ants, mice, silverfish
- Reduction in custodial staff

#### **Common Occupant Related Problems**

- Plants: too many; no water trays; over watering; dead leaves/plants/insect infestations
- Refrigerators on carpet
- Upholstered furniture brought from homes of staff
- Animals in class: seen more frequently in elementary grade classrooms
- Excessive clutter: seen more frequently in elementary grade classrooms

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The MDH recommendations for addressing these problems are:

### **Building Related Problems and Recommendations**

- Carpet near sinks
  - Recommendation: as carpet is replaced place hard flooring around sink area
- Ceiling stains
  - Recommendation: replace tiles; look for source of the moisture
- Pests / bus idling
  - Recommendation: develop and implement integrated pest management & no bus idling policies
- Walk-off mats
  - Recommendation: all entrances need walk-off mats

### **Occupant Related Problems and Recommendations**

- Plants
  - Recommendation: limit number of plants, require watering trays and encourage regular maintenance (such as tossing dead leaves) of plants
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- Small refrigerators (on carpet)
  - Recommendation: Prohibit personal refrigerators or require an impervious surface such as rubber tray
- Animals in classrooms
  - Recommendation: Remove animals from school, if possible; if not, keep animals in cages or localized areas and away from upholstered furniture and carpets
- Clutter (dust collector)
  - Recommendation: Remind staff that papers & general clutter is difficult to clean, collects dust and can worsen existing breathing problems such as asthma
- Upholstered furniture / stuffed toys
  - Recommendation: District-purchased items only or suggest small items that are washable in hot water
  - Wash removable covers in hot water on a regular basis

On XXXX, Laura Oatman accompanied XXXX the XXXX for School District XXX on a walkthrough XXXX school. The school district has an Indoor Air Quality Management Plan and all of the buildings were well maintained. The building specific observations and recommendations are provided on the following pages.

For additional information contact:

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## **Asthma Walkthroughs Sample Walkthrough Report**

**School**           Elementary School  
**Address**  
**Date**

### **General Observations**

- Plants
  - A few classrooms had too many plants (proper maintenance is difficult)
  - Water trays were not always used (excess water can drip on carpet causing mold growth)
  - A few plants had standing water in the water tray (promotes growth of biological agents)
  - Insect infestations were observed on several plants
  - Dead leaves (mold and cleaning issues)
- Carpet is located near water sources such as sinks (mold growth occurs if carpet becomes wet)
- Upholstered furniture and pillows were seen in classrooms (can be a source of dust mites)
- Excess clutter was noticed in a few classrooms (excess clutter can be a “dust collector” and is difficult to clean)
- Dust was noticed on light fixtures and window blinds (dust may be an irritant for some children with asthma)
- The ventilation system (Venmar) was partially blocked in a few classrooms (limits air circulation)

### **Recommendations**

- Plants
  - Recommendation: limit number of plants, require watering trays and encourage regular maintenance (such as tossing dead leaves) of plants
- Carpet near sinks
  - Recommendation: when carpet is replaced, use hard flooring around the sink area
- Upholstered furniture / stuffed toys
  - Recommendation: District-purchased items only or suggest small items that are washable in hot water
  - Wash small items in hot water on a regular basis
- Clutter (dust collector) and dust on fixtures
  - Recommendation: Remind staff that papers & general clutter is difficult to clean, collects dust and can worsen existing breathing problems such as asthma
  - Light fixtures and other surfaces should be cleaned (dusted) at least once a year
- Blocked ventilation system
  - Recommendation: Remind staff that to maintain good air quality inside their classrooms, it is important that objects not be placed in front of Venmar