

Just a Thought
By Kevin Delahunt

I recently attended a conference and had the pleasure of listening to a presentation by William Bahnfleth, Phd. Dr. Bahnfleth was the 2013-2014 president of ASHRAE and now is a professor at the Department of Architectural Engineering at The Pennsylvania State University. The topic of his presentation was "Shifting the Global IEQ Paradigm". For clarification Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) includes the conditions inside a building such as air quality, lighting, acoustics, thermal conditions and ergonomics and their effect on occupants. What I especially liked about his presentation was that it was not technical in nature but discussed how a multi-discipline approach is needed to provide a better environment for building occupants. According to him a multi-discipline approach of Architects, Mechanical Engineers, Building Owners, and Property Management firms need to work together with the goal of providing the best IEQ. This sounds simplistic but from my experience these individual building disciplines are often on a different page and come to a project with their own agenda. Does the Architect or Mechanical Engineer, or for that matter the Property Management firm, always make decisions based on what is best for the building occupant?

As I discussed in past columns improving building occupants' health and productivity, while reducing absenteeism, can have a much larger return on investment than energy reduction but is much harder to quantify. The difficulty and challenge that Dr. Bahnfleth pointed out in his presentation was that there are very few metrics to evaluate improvements on IEQ on a building by building basis and it is even more difficult to monetizing the effects of these improvements. There is, however, a wealth of compelling research and academic studies on the economic benefits of work performance improvements and how they far outweigh the costs of providing better IEQ. When the day comes when we can monetize these improvements then we will be really onto something.

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