Frequently Asked Questions: Construction and Renovation Projects

Construction and renovation projects present a variety of situations, which may impact the environment of your workspace. The following are among the most frequently asked questions.

1. Question: I suffer from asthma, but I am a very private person and I don't feel comfortable broadcasting my medical condition in staff meetings and yet I still need to take care of my own health when the renovations are going on nearby. What should I do?

Answer: Perhaps you could have a quiet chat with your Supervisor, at a time outside your staff meeting, and tell him/her about your concerns. An email message may accomplish the same thing. You know yourself best and can suggest a solution based on your past experience.

2. Question: Are there any hazardous effects from paint vapours that I should be concerned about?

Answer: Hazardous effects from exposure to paint vapours depend on the duration, concentration of exposure, and type of paint. Testing has shown that the painter is the person most exposed to paint vapours and, under typical conditions, is the only person who could be over-exposed. The concentration of paint vapors drops very quickly when outside the immediate area (e.g. beyond 2 meters from the source of paint). However, some individuals might experience possible side effects when exposed to a very low concentration of paint vapour.

3. Question: As a supervisor I have just been informed that a project will commence in my office area. What are my responsibilities to the staff in my department?

Answer: As the supervisor or designate who is in the position to represent the department you are responsible for the health and safety of workers in the work area affected. The following is a summation of your responsibilities;

- Obtain a copy of the Renovation & Construction: Health and Safety Guide for Managers
- Communicate with staff with respect to information about the project
- Sign the Projects Notification Form before the job starts
- Ensure the other department areas which might be affected are informed of the project
- Inform Project Coordinator of staff members who may be at increased risk in order to ensure that special arrangements are made.

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4. Question: Can construction-related dusts contribute to the development of asthma?

Answer: Depending on the materials contained in the construction dust, it may cause or trigger asthma-like symptoms in sensitive individuals. In any case, dust control measures (e.g., enclosure of construction area, frequent cleaning, etc.) should be in place. In addition, exposure to construction dust may cause some individuals to become sensitized to the substances in the dust.

August 2004
Sensitization could be a function of the dose of the substance, frequency of exposure, and the individual's susceptibility and response to the substance.

5. Question: It does not appear that the construction and/or renovation staff is following proper work procedures. What should I do? Can I approach the construction worker who is working improperly?

Answer: You should try not to approach a construction worker directly. You should contact your supervisor and inform him/her of the situation. He/she in turn will investigate and/or contact the project coordinator to relay your concerns.

6. Question: What are the Project Coordinator responsibilities?

Answer: In short the Project Coordinator is the York University employee in charge of a renovation or construction project. The following is a summation of his/her responsibilities;

- Ensure that contractors are given the booklet entitled York University Health and Safety and Fire Regulations for Contractors so that they are aware of their responsibilities
- Ensure compliance with the health safety practices required during the project implementation
- Attends the pre-project staff meetings
- Monitors the job site on behalf of York University
- Manages project communication and risk with respect to health and safety
- Ensures adherence to all necessary regulatory requirements
- Meets with the project planner and the department line manager to initiate the project work, including the discussion of the health and safety aspects of the job; impact to neighboring areas; completion of the project notification form

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7. Question: How do I find the name of the Project Coordinator who is responsible for work being done in my area?

There are several ways to identify who the Project Coordinator is for your area;

- Ask your supervisor and/or manager.
- The name of the Project Coordinator can be found on the Project Notification form, which is posted in your area
- Contact Facilities Services at ext. 22401

References:

http://www.yorku.ca/vpa/microsoft_files/RenConstGuide.doc

Boston College Environmental Health and Safety. eLCOSH Maintaining Indoor Air Quality. 
http://www.cdc.gov/elcosh/docs/d0500/d000520/d000520.html