



SISC BULLETIN

SELF-INSURED SCHOOLS of CALIFORNIA

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TO: District Superintendents
Directors of Maintenance and Operations
SISC II Member Districts

FROM: Catherine Wilson Jones, CSP
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SUBJECT: Energy Savings vs Fresh Air

In the recent past, California businesses have suffered rising energy costs. School districts are no different. Although there are many strategies that can be deployed to fight the energy battle, one method that is frequently used involves adjustment or alteration of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.

Common, and acceptable, approaches to achieve energy conservation through HVAC adjustment include changing temperature settings, clocking units off in non-occupied hours, and maintaining regular service schedules to ensure peak operation. However, one method that seems to be gaining popularity is to minimize or completely block off the outside air (OA) intake on the unit. Thus, the unit completely recirculates air in the space without any fresh air being brought in.

It has come to our attention that this most often occurs when districts enter into energy management contracts. Whether the contract includes the installation of new HVAC units, or alteration of existing systems, eliminating OA is contrary to current law. Therefore, as districts enter into such contracts, care should be taken to ensure the contract does not include the improper elimination of OA to achieve the promised energy savings. A careful review of the contract will prevent the district from entering into an agreement that is based on a violation of law.

The California Building Code (Title 24) requires OA be provided at specific rates. Ventilation rates are based on type of occupancy, number of occupants, and square footage. This is further supported by Cal/OSHA's requirement that ventilation units operate continuously while the space is occupied, including OA at rates required by Title 24. Outside air is needed to properly ventilate a space to remove excess carbon dioxide, keep odors in check, and to properly dilute other pollutants. A lack of OA in a classroom can quickly create an uncomfortable and unhealthy environment. Although blocking off the OA intake will achieve energy savings, it is inappropriate and illegal. There are a growing number of instances where districts have incurred high costs in workers' compensation claims and costly indoor air investigations that were caused or exacerbated by a lack of adequate OA. Such instances soon cost much more than any energy savings that may have been achieved.

So whether the system is modified by district personnel or by outside contractors as a result of an energy management contract, OA (and indoor air quality) should not be compromised to achieve energy savings. In addition to the above, please note that portable classrooms should be purchased with an OA kit. This will prevent having to retrofit units later at an additional cost.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact your SISC Safety and Loss Control representative.

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