



Air Quality and Wellbeing at Work Survey 2019

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Introduction

Workplace wellbeing relates to all aspects of working life: from the quality and safety of the physical environment; to how workers feel about their work; their working environment; the climate at work; and work organisation.

The aim of measures for workplace wellbeing is to complement OSH (Occupational Safety and Health) measures to make sure workers are safe, healthy, satisfied and engaged at work.

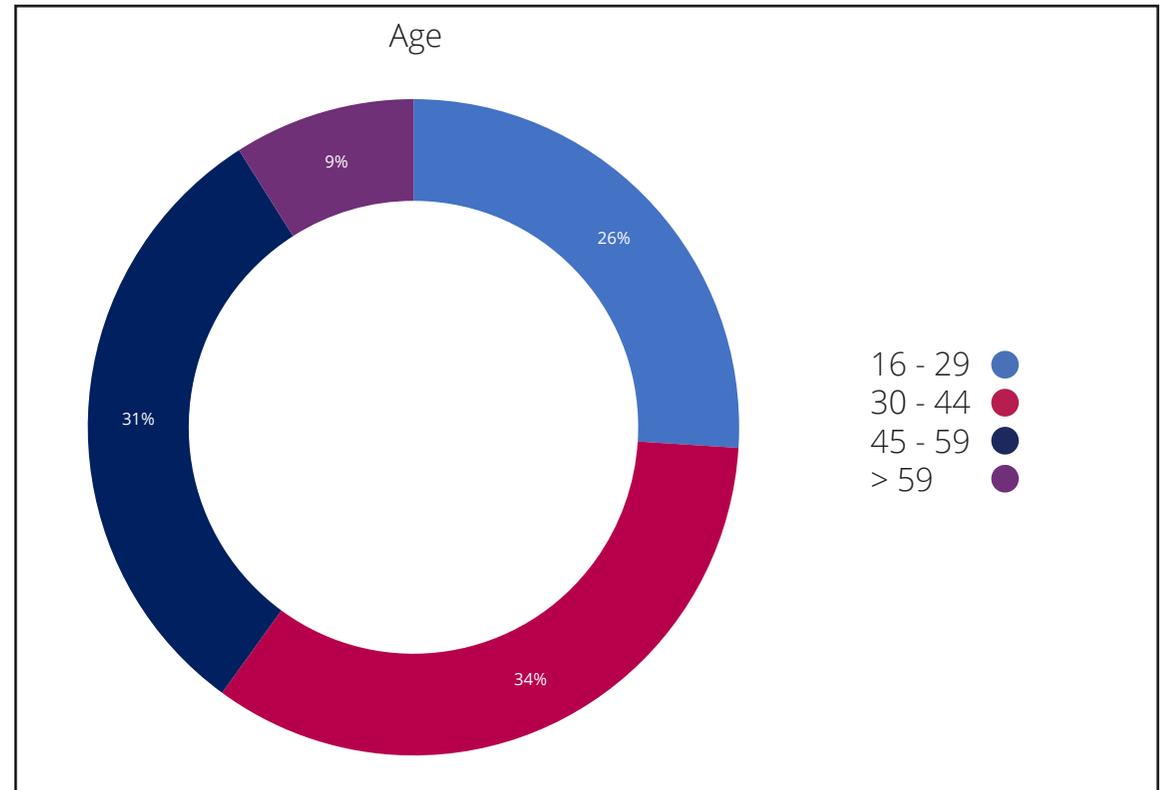
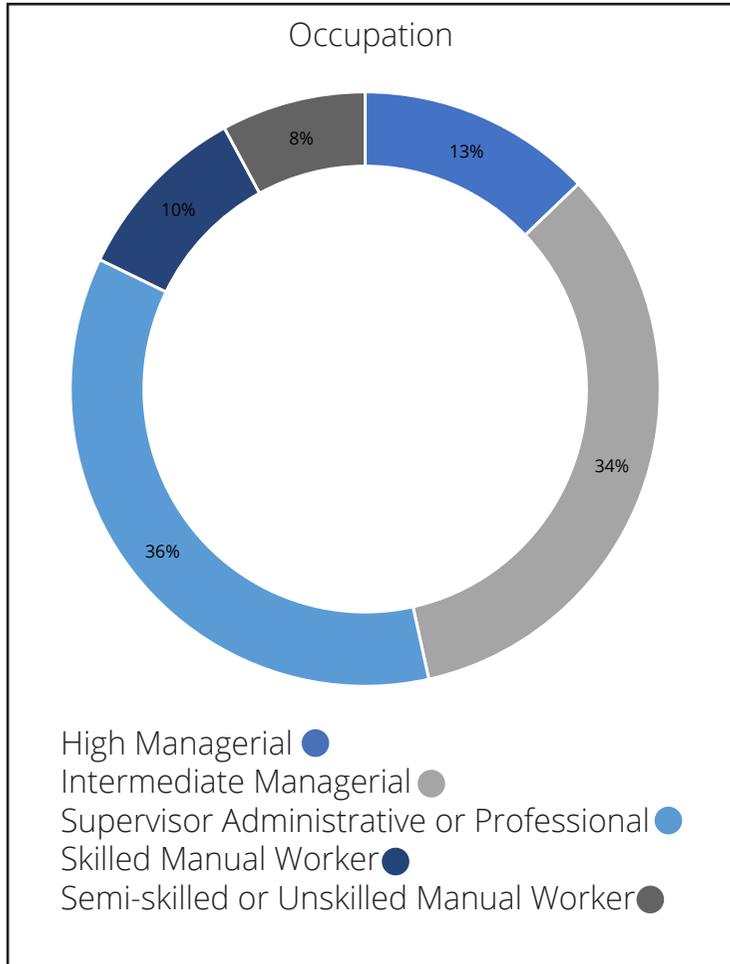
With this in mind, the Remark Group, in collaboration with Dr Nigel Oseland a workplace strategist and environmental psychologist, have created this report from their 'Air Quality & Wellbeing at Work' survey. The survey has been conducted with over 1,000 UK respondents, to determine whether air quality impacts a person's workplace wellbeing, productivity and overall happiness.

Dr Nigel Oseland commented:

"I am shocked by the results of this survey, but not entirely surprised. Whilst we are producing some great looking modern offices, we need to pay more attention to basic human needs, to the so-called hygiene factors, such as good indoor air quality, temperature control and noise reduction. The various disciplines within the workplace industry need a concerted effort for a marked step change from sick buildings to healthy buildings. Everyone has the right to work in a healthy workplace."

Overview

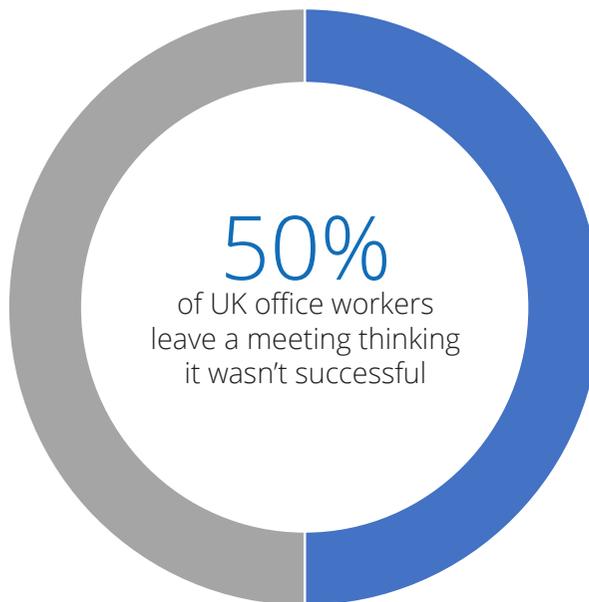
The 'Air Quality and Wellbeing at Work' survey was conducted by the Remark Group and Dr Nigel Oseland to see whether air quality impacts a persons productivity and/or wellbeing. The survey had over 1,000 UK office based respondents with 50% male and 50% female.



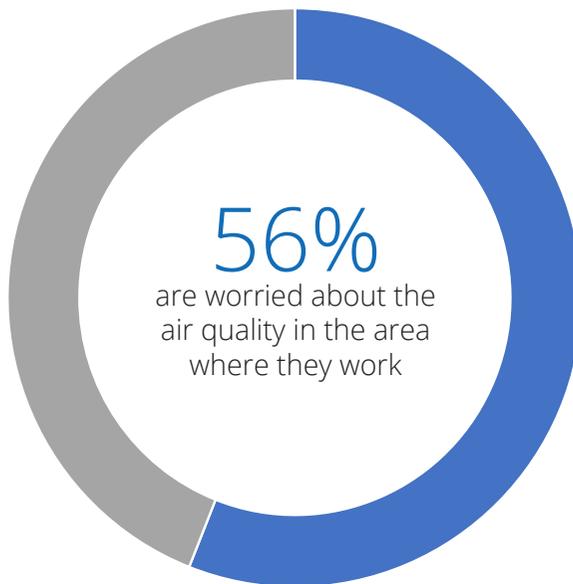
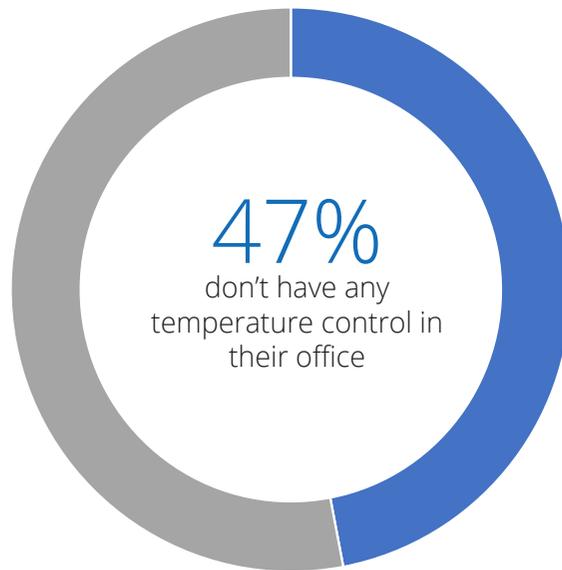
Key Findings

Remark Group's research shows that poor indoor air quality is associated with lack of productivity and negative wellbeing.

- 77% of UK office workers are based in open plan or private offices, 80% think that poor indoor air quality could be having a negative impact on their health
- Nearly 90% of UK office workers say they find themselves nodding off or losing concentration in meetings
- Half of UK office workers leave meetings thinking they weren't successful
- 80% think that poor indoor air quality could be having a negative impact on their productivity at work
- Nearly all office workers (91%) say they suffer from tiredness or lethargy at work
- 56% are worried about air quality in the area in which they work
- 30% won't open windows as they are worried about exterior air quality



Air Quality in the Office



Poor air quality and pollution is something that we are all aware of but as we cannot see it, it's not at the top of our priorities and it's not always clear how polluted the air is. In the 'Air Quality and Wellbeing at Work' survey, it's interesting to note that people worry more about their appearance and being late for work than they do about pollution/air quality – this could be due to the lack of visibility.

Today's average office can drain happiness, health and even productivity. Ensuring that air quality is regulated can reduce symptoms such as headaches, fatigue and eye irritation, while increasing productivity and general wellbeing.

There are multiple factors of air quality that could lead to a drop in productivity or wellbeing: an obvious factor is temperature. Temperature can have a direct influence on the brain's cognitive function, research from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory indicates that performance declines by 2% for each degree above 25°C and by 4.7% for each degree below 21°C.

Another factor that can have a serious impact on productivity levels and wellbeing is CO₂, CO₂ is naturally present in fresh air at a concentration of 0.03 – 0.045%. The primary source of CO₂ indoors is people; if a crowded indoor space is not adequately ventilated, carbon dioxide can build up to levels where people start to feel sleepy, lethargic, dizzy, can have difficulty concentrating and cause headaches.

Through the 'Air Quality and Wellbeing at Work' survey results you can see some direct effects of high levels of CO₂ and unhealthy temperatures.

Air Quality and Productivity



Recent research has shown that productivity in the UK has dwindled. At one point, the UK had the highest level of productivity within Europe, but since the 1960's, other European companies have shot past the UK in terms of productivity – France and Germany being the main contenders.

Air quality could be having a direct impact on the productivity levels of UK office workers. In the results from the 'Air Quality and Wellbeing at Work' survey, 80% of 1,000 respondents think that poor indoor air quality could be having a negative impact on their productivity at work.

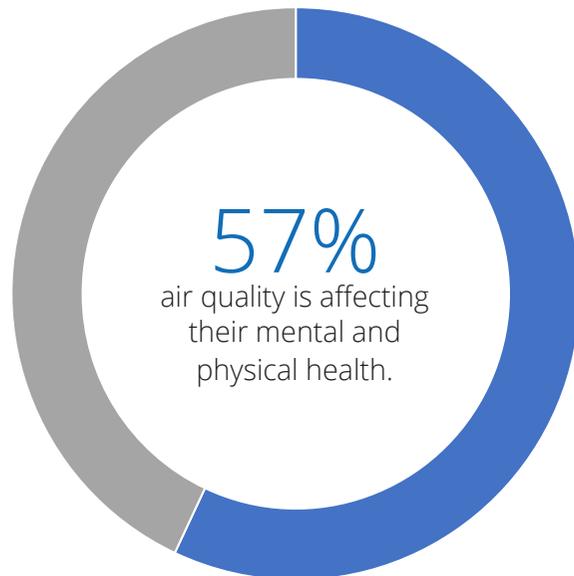
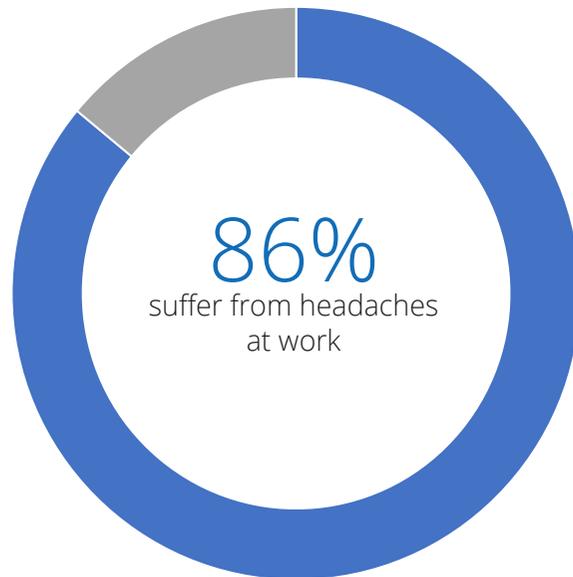
Meetings don't seem to be that productive either, with 90% of office workers saying that they find themselves nodding off or losing concentration in meetings and half of people leave meetings thinking they weren't successful.

UK offices have a strong culture of meetings, with almost 90% of people having up to 10 meetings per week and 72% spending up to 11 hours in meetings every week - 34% of these meetings taking place in rooms without windows.

Lack of productivity could be a direct link to poor indoor air quality, in particular high levels of CO₂ (which can be quite common in meeting rooms) and temperatures above 25°C. Humidity could also be having a direct impact on an employee's productivity, with low levels of humidity also causing irritations to the eyes and skin.

For productivity levels to increase within UK businesses, indoor air quality of workplaces and meeting rooms need to be taken into consideration.

Air Quality and Wellbeing



As a known factor for affecting an individual's wellbeing, comfort and productivity within the workplace, air quality is now becoming a concern for those wanting to improve the wellbeing and health of their employees.

In the 'Air Quality and Wellbeing at Work' survey, 80% of UK office workers believe that poor indoor air quality is having a negative effect on their wellbeing in the workplace and a further 57% think that air quality is affecting their mental and physical health.

We can see from the results that symptoms of sick building syndrome are rife, with nearly all office workers (91%) saying they suffer from tiredness or lethargy at work with 41% of them feeling lethargic on a daily basis.

Other symptoms are also present with 86% reporting they suffer from headaches at work and only 11% of people describe their sleep quality as good during the working week.

Factors such as high CO2 levels contribute to a stuffy atmosphere, causing employees to feel tired, lethargic and unmotivated to be productive. In many work environments, CO2 levels are above 1000ppm and are often the result of poor ventilation and/or circulation within the space.

Humidity also plays a huge role in workplace comfort and can have a big impact on productivity and motivation. If humidity levels are too low, employees may start to feel irritation in their skin, eyes and throat. However, if too high, the space could promote the growth of unsightly and unhygienic mould, bacteria and dust mites.

Conclusion

We can see clearly from the 'Air Quality and Wellbeing at Work' survey results that poor indoor air quality is having a negative effect on an employee's wellbeing and productivity. In particular the effect that air quality is having on the productivity of meetings.

Today's office environments can drain happiness, health and even productivity but ensuring that air quality is regulated can reduce symptoms such as headaches, fatigue and eye irritation, while increasing productivity and general wellbeing.

Air quality sensors can now monitor nine different elements, with the most important being humidity, temperature and carbon dioxide. By using air quality sensors, you can maintain the right level of air quality and enable all employees to benefit from a comfortable working environment.

It is clear that air quality does need to be monitored within the workplace to ensure that occupants are working at their highest ability. Air quality sensors are a great way of monitoring the air and assessing what needs to be done but there are multiple solutions to poor indoor air quality.

For some companies, simply opening the windows and adding more plants into the office is a great solution. Air purifiers can assist in removing contaminants from the air in a room to improve air quality. There are also living plant walls that combine the benefits of nature with technology.

Whilst sick building syndrome is still discussed, it is not as prevalent as it was in the 1990s, when it made the headlines. Office wellbeing is of paramount importance and it is clear that a person's work environment can impact significantly, not only on their health and wellbeing, but also on their performance.

"It is therefore crucial that today's businesses focus on creating healthy buildings which encourage wellness and productivity. They can do so, by monitoring air quality in the office and embracing new technologies to ensure that the work environment promotes workplace wellbeing."

- Dr Nigel Oseland

About the Remark Group

The Remark Group specialises in intelligent business technology – from video and audio conferencing through to sound masking solutions.

The company is dedicated to delivering specialist solutions for forward-thinking businesses throughout the UK. Remark Group is passionate about providing solutions that enhance practices and their workforce, Remark can provide solutions to assist companies in creating healthy and productive workplaces.

Dr Nigel Oseland is a workplace strategist, change manager, environmental psychologist, researcher, international speaker and author. Dr Oseland draws on his psychology background and his own research to advise occupiers on how to redefine their workstyles and rethink their workplace to create working environments that enhance individual and organisational performance and deliver maximum value.

Get in touch

Website: www.remark-group.co.uk

Email: info@remark-group.co.uk

Twitter: [@TheRemarkGroup](https://twitter.com/TheRemarkGroup)

Telephone: 01733 405 965

Address: Lake Ridge | 4 Flaxley Road | Kingston Park | Peterborough | PE2 9FT

