

Indoor Air Quality Survey
Conducted by Joint Indoor Air Quality Committee
January-April 2003

Introduction

The IAQ Committee distributed a survey with its January 2003 newsletter to address the issues of second-hand smoke at entrances, dry erase markers, and fragranced cleaning products. These issues had come up repeatedly in IAQ Request for Action concern forms sent to the committee. The newsletter survey elicited about 90 replies. In an attempt to reach a larger audience, we sent out the survey again on Groupwise in March 2003. The committee received an additional 75 replies, for a total of 165.

Results

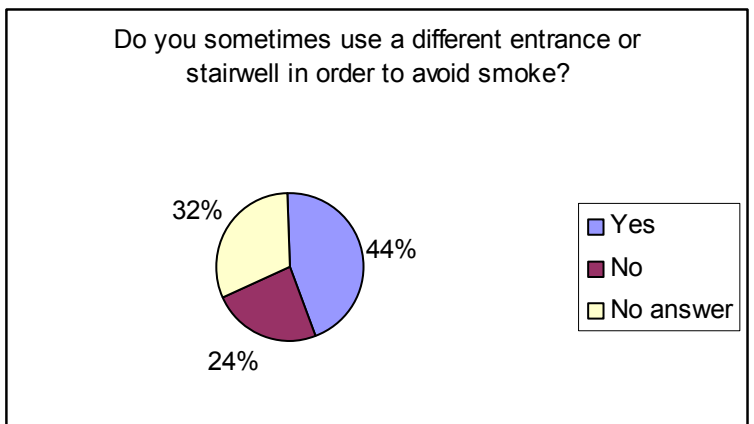
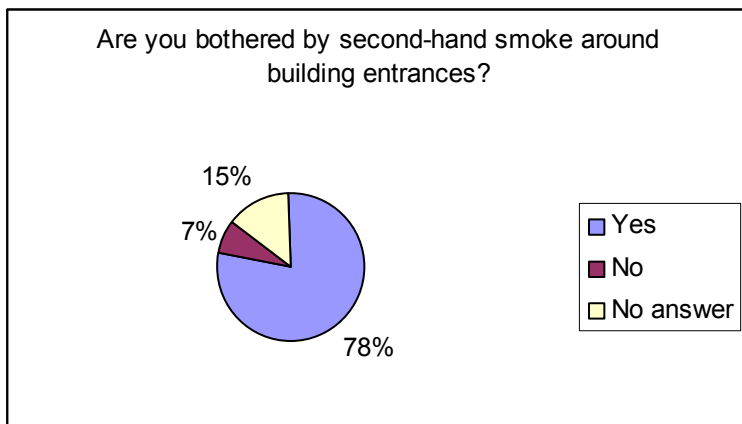
The survey was divided into three sections. The first asked questions about the problem of cigarette smoke at building entrances, the second solicited input regarding problems caused by dry-erase markers, and the final section was concerned with the use of fragranced cleaning products. The first section produced rather clear-cut results, while the findings of the second two parts were more ambiguous.

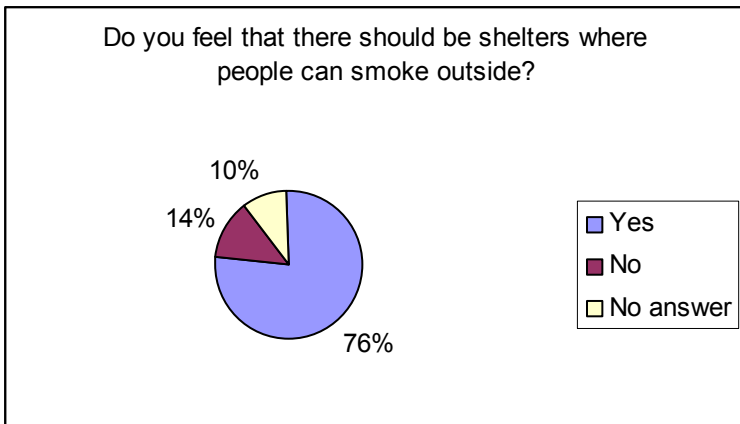
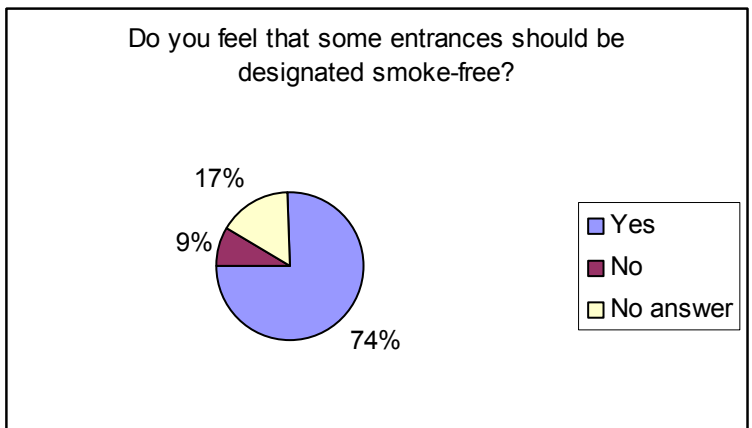
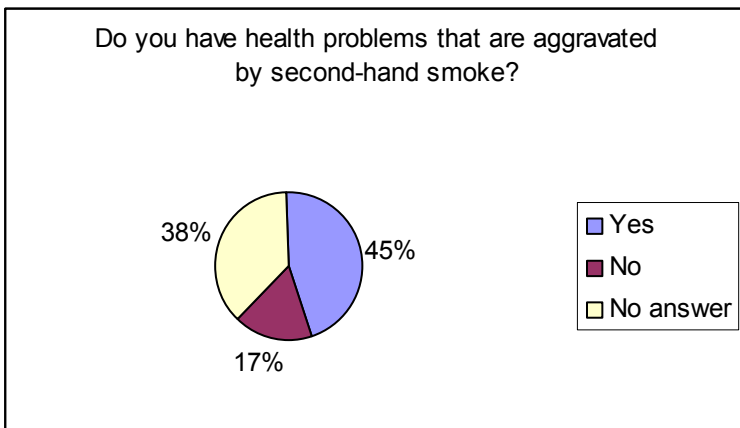
Smoke-Free Entrances

The first section of the survey, which addressed the issue of second-hand smoke at entrances, showed that an overwhelming majority (78%) of the respondents were bothered by the problem. Approximately equal numbers (74% and 76%, respectively) felt that some building entrances should be designated as smoke-free, and that MATC should provide places outdoors where people can go to smoke comfortably. A little less than half (44% and 45%, respectively) stated that they actually avoided the entrances where smokers congregate, and that they had diagnosed health problems which were aggravated by second-hand smoke.

Many respondents stated that asthma and/or allergies made entering through a cloud of second-hand smoke hazardous. Twenty-one survey respondents stated that they had either asthma or allergies. In addition, there were many comments on the bad image that comes from having people congregated around entrances smoking cigarettes, and that the litter created by smokers makes a very bad impression on visitors and prospective students.

The committee's research has found that many institutions of higher learning in Wisconsin have a policy that prohibits smoking within 25 feet of an entrance, and high schools totally ban smoking on campus, including sidewalks and parking lots, and many comments from the IAQ survey echoed these strategies.





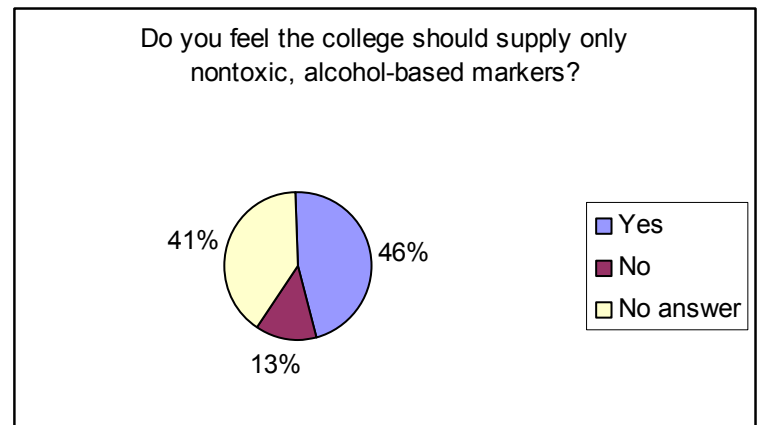
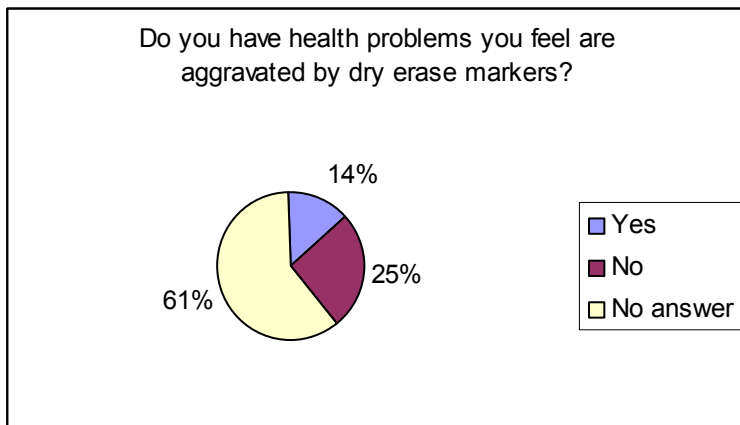
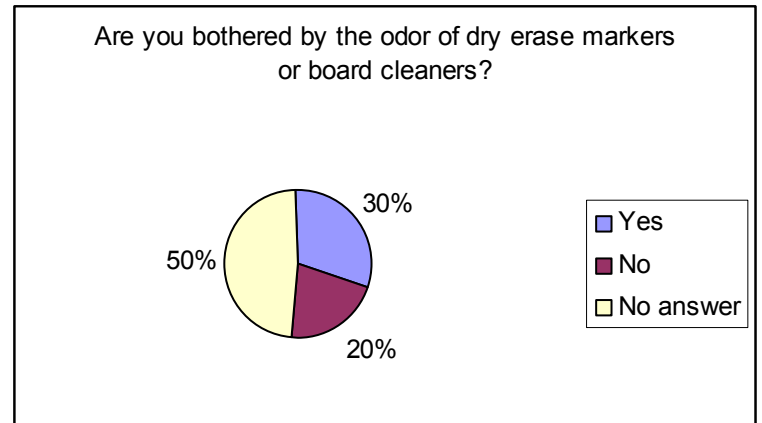
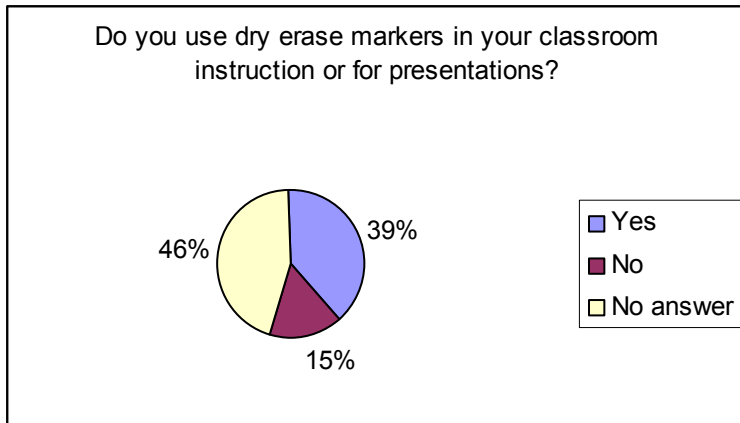
The North Campus instituted a pilot project in Fall 2002 that designates the main entrance and west entrance as smoke-free. According to Archie Graham, Student Life Coordinator, the response has generally been favorable. The compliance rate has been higher at the main entrance, since it is more visible and easier to enforce, than at the west entrance. Favorable comments have outweighed any negative responses, however.

Smoke-free entrances, coupled with strict enforcement, would keep second-hand smoke out of the buildings, but it would force smokers into the position of having to “stand in the rain or huddle like cattle in the winter”, as stated in one comment. The results of the survey suggest that many respondents (76%) favor the installation of outdoor shelters for smokers. Adequate ashtrays would need to be provided to address the litter issue, and the areas would need to be cleaned regularly. Multiple shelters, strategically placed, would increase the likelihood of compliance, thus protecting the rights of smokers along with the health of nonsmokers. One respondent cited Aurora Sinai Medical Center as one institution that has dealt successfully with this issue by providing two smoking shelters for use by employees and patients alike, and recommended that MATC use the hospital as a model.

Dry Erase Markers

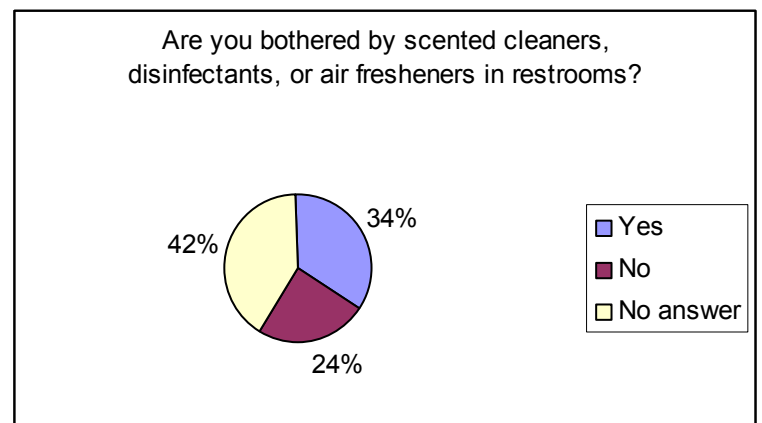
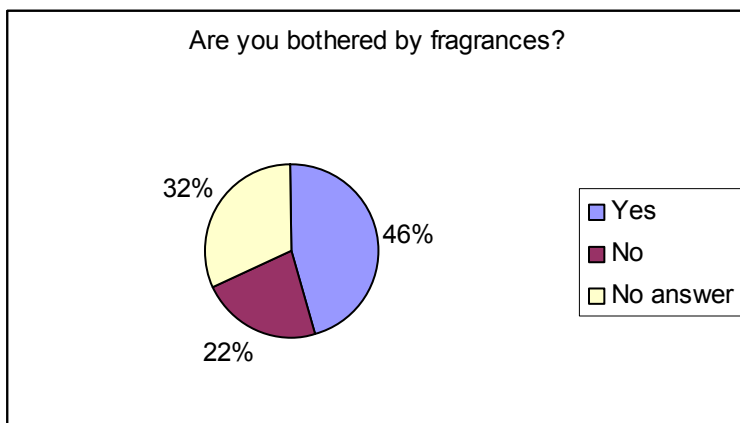
The survey gave less straightforward input regarding dry-erase markers. The rate of response on this question was much lower, presumably because the number of people who use markers is much lower. Of the 39% who said that they used the markers, however, about three-quarters said that the fumes bothered them, and more than a third of them had health problems they felt were aggravated by the markers. The final question, regarding what type of markers the college should make available had the largest positive response; 46% said that only alcohol-based markers should be available. However, one respondent commented that s/he was far more sensitive to the alcohol-based markers than to the more toxic ketone-based ones, so perhaps the school should investigate other nontoxic options and continue to offer a choice.

Another respondent stated that the problem was similar to that of chalkboards, since the dust causes breathing problems for some people. In addition, it was pointed out that the Instructional Media Department is actively pursuing the equipping of classrooms and labs with electronic whiteboards, eliminating the need for either markers or chalk, thus suggesting that this may be a short-term problem.

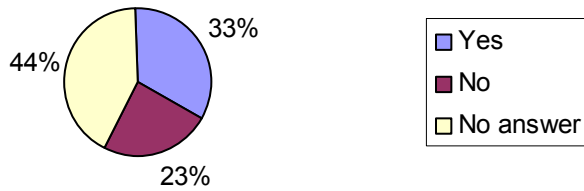


Fragrances

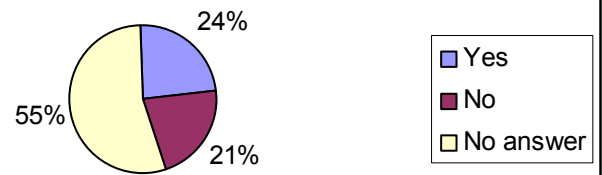
The final section of the survey attempted to address problems that people had when cleaning products or other chemicals with fragrances were used. Unfortunately, it was clear from the comments that many people interpreted the questions to be about personal fragrances, such as perfumes, aftershaves, and deodorants, so the survey may not have uncovered what the IAQ committee had hoped to learn. The data, taken at face value, show that many people (46%) are bothered by fragrances of some sort, about one-third are bothered by scented cleaning products, and 24% have health problems they feel are related to fragrances. Almost half (49%) favor the institution's adoption of a low-fragrance or no-fragrance policy. These results suggest that the college needs to investigate low-fragrance, low-VOC cleaning options, especially in restrooms where ventilation may not be optimal.



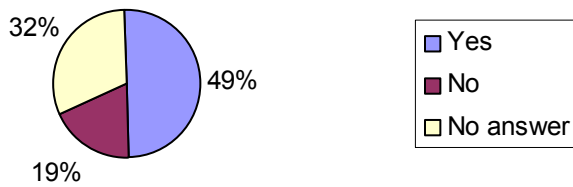
Are you bothered by scented cleaning products in classrooms and hallways?



Do you have health problems you feel are aggravated by fragrances?



Do you feel the college should adopt a low-fragrance or no-fragrance policy?



Conclusion

This IAQ survey supports the establishment of smoke-free entrances at all District facilities by an overwhelming majority of 74%, and the installation of smoking shelters by an even larger majority of 76%. Nearly half (45%) state that they have health problems aggravated by second-hand smoke. Based on these results, the IAQ Committee recommends that the college's smoking policy be reviewed and revised. Judging by the success of the North Campus pilot project, we recommend that the main entrance and other high-traffic entrances of all campus buildings be designated smoke-free. We suggest that the changes be phased in, and feel that the installation of smoking shelters would help with compliance and enforcement.

Since 77% of dry erase marker users are bothered by the fumes, and many have health concerns, the IAQ Committee recommends that the college supply nontoxic low-VOC markers. This change is supported by nearly half of all survey respondents, whether or not they use dry erase markers.

The data show that nearly half of survey respondents (46%) are bothered by fragrances, and one-third by scented cleaning products. Because fragrances pose serious health risks, and can serve as a trigger for asthma and allergies, the IAQ committee recommends that the college investigate and purchase low-fragrance, low-VOC cleaning products and disinfectants.

All of these changes would have a positive impact on indoor air quality at a relatively small cost. In addition, they would support the college's mission of teaching and learning, reduce healthcare costs, and enhance the image of MATC in the community.