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COVID-19 Survey: 50% of Facilities Managers Don't Have Reliable, Unbiased Information for Critical Indoor Air Quality Investments

Nearly 60% of Companies Spent Over \$500,000, 26% Spent More Than \$5M to Upgrade, Install HVAC Systems

MUKILTEO, Wash. — As the nation stumbled its way through the pandemic in the past year, with public fears and government mandates abounding, most companies (95.6%) tried to do something to combat COVID-19 transmission in poorly ventilated, indoor spaces. Unfortunately, according to a new survey released today, they often made subpar investments, spending millions of dollars with limited success. The survey was commissioned by [Omni CleanAir](#), a maker of commercial-grade air purification systems that have been eliminating airborne illnesses for more than 30 years.

“We polled more than 430 HR managers around the country on the importance of various COVID-19 precautions and defense measures, their knowledge of indoor air quality topics, and their budgets and spending forecasts. The survey’s results will help business leaders make better decisions to ensure the health and safety of their employees and other stakeholders,” said Paul de la Port, president of Omni CleanAir. “In the past year, almost every business surveyed took some action to improve indoor air quality, but while organizations invested hundreds of thousands (in some cases millions) of dollars, measurable results are lacking.”

The nationwide survey, conducted by Pollfish, April through May 2021, consisted of an online survey of 436 HR Managers of companies with 500 or more employees. The margin of error was +/- 5%, with a confidence level of 95%.

Many Steps Taken, Many Dollars Spent to Improve Indoor Air Quality

The most popular approach by businesses was to upgrade existing HVAC systems because these changes can be done quickly and easily — but HVAC upgrades are quite expensive, typically costing more than \$500,000 and in some cases as much as \$5,000,000 depending on the number and size of the facilities. Additionally, for an upgraded HVAC system to improve air quality, it must operate continuously while the building is occupied, which is very expensive. In other cases, businesses felt compelled



to try relatively new and unproven ionization technologies, which are increasingly under attack from [academics](#) and government agencies for being ineffective and possibly dangerous.

“The noisy environment, lack of transparent and easily understood real world efficacy data, and unscrupulous COVID-19 opportunists appear to have clouded the landscape so much that many businesses simply were unable to make informed investment decisions about indoor air quality solutions,” said de la Port.

When asked what kind of improvements were made within the last 12 months, respondents revealed the following trends:

Solution	Respondents (%)
Upgraded existing HVAC systems that support improved filtration (e.g., MERV13)	73.38
Upgraded existing HVAC systems that support medical-grade filtration (e.g., HEPA)	63.79
Installed new HVAC systems	60.67
Deployed portable air purification systems (HEPA filtration machines)	51.56
Deployed UVGI systems for germicidal irradiation	42.21
Deployed ionization technologies	37.65
Other	0.24

Cost, Efficacy of HVAC Solutions Vastly Underestimated by Businesses

Survey data also show that HR managers and their COVID-19 task force colleagues are vastly underestimating the cost of HVAC upgrades. Among those who have not yet invested in solutions to improve indoor air quality, a majority anticipate they will upgrade their HVAC systems despite the growing evidence that these upgrades have minimal effect on improving indoor air quality or reducing transmission risk.

“What many businesses don’t realize is that HVAC systems, even when they can eliminate the virus, require large amounts of electricity to operate, so the long-term cost will be very burdensome and the resulting air often won’t be adequately cleaned,” said de la Port.

Perceived Importance of a Variety of COVID-19 Solutions



When asked to rank the following measures in order of most important (1) to least important (8) for combating COVID-19 in their organization, HR managers, in aggregate, revealed how they prioritize the following items:

Measures	Mean
Hand washing or sanitizing stations and supplies	3.29
Social distancing through traffic control, barriers, plexiglass	3.52
Centralized HVAC system upgrades	4.09
Portable air purification (HEPA) systems or other indoor air quality technologies	4.32
Masks and other PPE	4.92
Opening windows and doors	5.0
Running box or ceiling fans	5.18
Alternate or remote work schedules	5.68

“It’s clear from the survey that HR and facilities managers struggled to sift through the COVID-19 noise to determine the best options for combating the virus and while most recognized that it is airborne, the best solution to fighting it remains unclear,” said de la Port. “For example, we know that you only have [a 1 in 10,000 chance](#) of getting infected via a contaminated surface, yet it’s at the top of the list of things businesses have done and are continuing to do to fight COVID-19.”

Businesses Planning Indoor Air Quality Spending in the Next Year

Of the survey respondents whose businesses hadn’t yet taken actions to improve indoor air quality most indicated they would allocate spending to ventilation in the next year. Of the small minority who said they would do nothing, they cited lack of education and information, as well as satisfaction with current air quality standards in their facilities. Here is the breakdown:

Expected Action	Respondents (%)
Plan on investing in solutions to improve indoor air quality within the next 12 months	79
Expect to do so by upgrading or implementing HVAC systems	73.3
Anticipate spending between \$50,000 and \$500,000 on HVAC upgrades, vastly underestimating the actual cost	40



No plans to doing anything about indoor air quality because of insufficient education about the importance of ventilation and indoor air quality	50
Of those not doing anything, they said current ventilation and indoor air quality already met their safety standards	75

The entire survey results can be viewed [here](#).

About Omni CleanAir

Omni CleanAir's mission is to eliminate the illnesses caused by unhealthy air. Since 1988, the company's technology has been deployed to thousands of high-stakes applications where keeping people safe from some of the most dangerous airborne pollutants and pathogens is a matter of life and death. The company delivers safe air in diverse environments, including communities impacted by wildfire smoke, construction projects involving environmental remediation (Asbestos, Mold, Lead, Silica), hospitals for patient isolation and ICRA regulations compliance, and nuclear facilities during decommissioning. More info at www.omnicleanair.com.

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