

The Evening Standard

10/28/03

Excerpt from "Beat the Office Health Hazards"

By Penny Cottee

An unavoidable enemy in the office is the cocktail of chemicals that surrounds us. Did you know, for example, that carpets and chairs may contain formaldehyde, inks give off benzene, and photocopiers and PC monitors emit toluene? The effects of these can include breathing problems, eye irritation, anaemia, nausea and impaired co-ordination.

Increased ventilation will help, but your best friend in tackling hidden chemicals is an office plant. Humble spider plants, peace lilies and chrysanthemums will absorb chemicals and convert them into food for themselves - a win-win situation. Plants are also natural humidifiers and help to combat the dry atmospheres which can lead to sore throats and itchy eyes.

Campaigning organisation Plants for People (PfP) has long exhorted the benefits of office plants, as studies have shown they also help reduce stress. "Plants have a calming effect on us," explains PfP's Colleen Smith.

"Research proves that those of us who sit behind computer screens for more than four hours a day not

only feel better when we have a plant on our desk, but we are more productive too."