

GREEN BUSINESSES CONTINUE TO GROW

Globally, one point six million people die from indoor air pollution each year, that's one death every 20 seconds.¹ Now a leading Australian environmental professor says indoor plants can dramatically improve indoor air quality and increase employee productivity.

Professor Margaret Burchett from Australia's University of Technology in Sydney tested a variety of indoor plants and revealed they can remove high doses of air-borne volatile organic compounds, as well as carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide. The volatile compounds are released by outdoor products including fossil fuel emissions and from materials such as plastics in an indoor environment.

"Indoor air is almost always more polluted than outdoors," Professor Burchett says. "This is because when contaminated air is drawn indoors, it mixes with more interior pollutants.

"Plants in offices greatly improve indoor air quality, as the entire plant system - including leaves, roots and potting mix - help suck up the nasty gases. The gases are released in offices by furnishings, carpets, photocopiers and printers," says Burchett.

A leading New Zealand provider of indoor plants for commercial premises says a recent study ranks indoor air pollution as one of the top five environmental hazards to public health.²

"Nowadays people are spending more than 90 per cent of their time indoors, much of which is in workplaces³," says **Ambius** spokesman, Grant McEwen. **Ambius** is the new name for Initial Tropical Plants New Zealand, a key provider of indoor plants, and silk floral arrangements for commercial environments.

"Research tells us many people are suffering ill health from poor interior air quality and the studies clearly show indoor plants have a positive effect on employees and can impact the bottom line of a business."

¹ World Health Organization, "Indoor Air Pollution & Health"
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs292/en/index.html>

² "Indoor Air Quality & Health in Office Buildings", thesis, Su Xiao, Faculty of Architecture, University of Auckland, April 2005

³ Ibid

Research from Australia, the US, and Europe has shown plants help reduce stress and absence through sickness, increase productivity and improve well-being, particularly in office environments where people are using computers. Many employees say they take more sick days because of miserable office surroundings.

“There would be few offices where employees would not be using computers, and the research proves living plants are vital in getting the best from workers,” says Mr McEwen.

A study at Washington State University showcasing a windowless computer lab revealed when plants were present occupants showed a 12 per cent quicker reaction time on a computer task. Their blood pressure readings were lower and they reported feeling more attentive immediately after the task than people in a room with no plants.⁴

In an office in Norway staff working for the country’s largest oil company were split into two groups. One of the groups had plants in its working environment, while the other didn’t. The employees were tested for different symptoms such as fatigue, dizziness, and coughing. The study confirmed the symptoms affecting concentration decreased by a quarter when there were plants in the offices.⁵

“In past tough economic times, indoor plants were often removed for cost cutting reasons,” says Mr McEwen. “But now studies show us plants can have a direct impact on business performance.

Recognition of the role of indoor plants is growing, with the New Zealand Green Building Council now awarding up to two points towards green star ratings for interior plant installations.⁶

Ambius has offices in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, as well as all throughout Australia. More than 100 people are employed by the company in New Zealand working in various plant technician, sales, support and managerial roles.

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For more information visit www.ambius.co.nz or contact:

Tracy Stephen

Ambius Business Manager, Wellington

T: +64 4 570 3805

⁴ “Interior plants may improve worker productivity & reduce stress in a windowless environment,” Virginia I. Lohr, Caroline H. Pearson-Mims & Georgia K Goodwin, Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture, Washington State University

⁵ “Do plants in offices promote health?” Prof. Dr. Tove Fjeld, Agricultural University of Norway

⁶ New Zealand Green Building Council, Green Star NZ, Office Interiors Pilot, <http://www.nzgbc.org.nz/>

M: 027 333 5062

E: tracy.stephen@ambius.co.nz

Grant McEwen

Ambius Regional Manager

T: +61 2 87 19 6358

M: 0404 055 738

E: Grant.McEwen@ambiusindoorplants.com.au

Anne Briggs

Ambius Marketing & Communications Manager

T: + 61 2 6629 5055

M: 0411 035 876

E: Anne.Briggs@ambiusindoorplants.com.au