

Silvan House Humidity Meeting – 1 February 2008

(Those present: Jean Lindsay, Kate Fielding, Bill Robertson, Linda McGinley, and John Gibson)

Brief Update

Myself and John Gibson (Prospect) had a very positive meeting when we met with HR today, to find out what progress they had made in finding a solution to the Silvan House low humidity issue.

Firstly, we were encouraged by Jean Lindsay, Acting Director HR's comment that she considered that there was a moral case for this issue to be addressed, and that HR were committed to doing all they could to find a practical solution. HR agreed that the low levels were unacceptable, and well outside the recommended percentage¹, especially during the winter months. . Jean reassured us that funding shouldn't be an issue, and if necessary, she was prepared to make a business case for additional funds.

That said, the task to find a practical solution was proving a challenge. Managing humidity in office buildings is a complex area, and there are no straightforward solutions. Bill Robertson has been researching the options available and provided us with an update on his findings to date:

Free Standing Humidifiers

This option was discussed at the meeting we had last year, and Bill had agreed to research it further. However, this has now been rejected on the basis of impracticality and possible health risks. It would take approx. 9 units per half a floor, to make any impact, and this would be noisy and take up valuable floor space. This type of humidifier may indeed expose staff to other health risks, due to the possibility of bacteria multiplying in the standing water in the tanks. To keep the units 'safe' would require very high maintenance. Bill considers it unlikely that our landlord would agree to this option on the grounds of this health risk.

Central Ducted System

This option is a non-starter, as since refurbishment the building no longer has the infrastructure to support such a system. Our Landlord would not agree to this either, and it would also carry similar health risks as described above.

Direct Humidification System

On a more positive note, upon further research, Bill has identified another option, a system that would pump out a very fine spray of water (a mist), whenever the humidity level dropped below a certain level. Bill has been in touch with the company that install these systems, and hopes to have some more facts and figures to report back on in a couple of weeks. He will also need to assess the practicalities of installation, and consult with the landlord, although he doesn't think that the landlord would have any reason to object. Bill had details of a case study involving a similar size of building as Silvan House, and they had successfully installed one of these systems

We all agreed that sounded encouraging, and asked Bill pursue this further and get back to us.

We also briefly discussed window opening in SH, and Bill commented that leaving the windows open on the landings would have a very limited impact on the overall humidity levels.

Linda McGinley
1 February 2008

¹ The Health and Safety Executive recommends a 'normal range' for humidity of between 40% and 70%, as does the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers. In Silvan House, although during the summer humidity levels can reach 35% - 40%, during the winter months 20% - 25% is normal and on very cold days can get as low as 15% or 16%.