

# the enemy within

**V**isitors from abroad could be excused for thinking this country is falling apart: The Foot and Mouth outbreak is still ravaging the countryside; Leicester has just been hit by a wave of TB cases; and pilgrims returning from Mecca have brought a new strain of meningitis back to the UK with fatal consequences.

No wonder the tourism industry is suffering.

Never have employers and service providers been under greater pressure to safeguard the health of staff and customers. One major airline is fighting a lawsuit filed by 32 complainants who claim to have contracted TB on a long haul flight and figures released by the

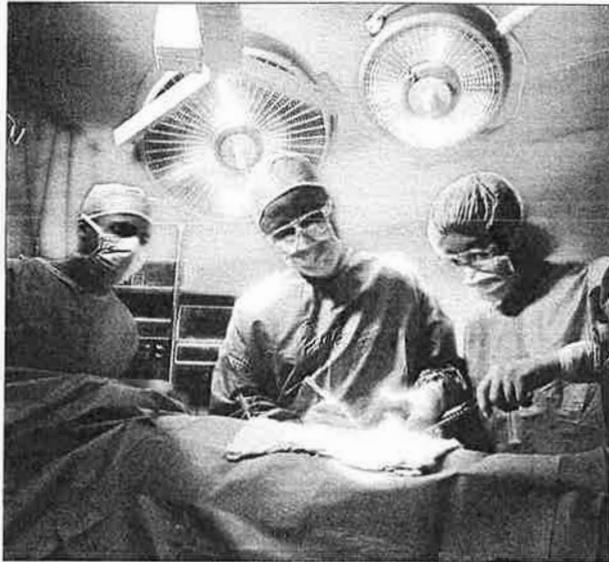


Photo courtesy of Denco

NHS show that 5,000 people died from cross-infections contracted while in hospital last year.

Contaminated air is, in the worst cases, a killer and, in the best, the cause of a range of debilitating symptoms that hammer productivity and the overall well being of thousands of British office workers every year. The fact that these days we spend about 90% of our time in sealed buildings and cars or other forms of transportation means that we are extremely vulnerable to airborne infections.

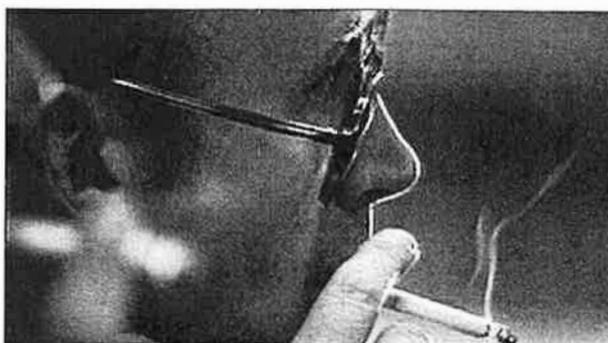
On the following pages, we round up latest developments as the building services engineering sector continues in its role as the unsung hero in the battle against an invisible enemy.

## No smoke without a charter

**S**moking in work and public places remains an emotive health issue with those in favour of a total ban opposed by many business interests who are turning to the ventilation industry for a solution.

Publicans are the most high profile group opposed to a smoking ban, but conscious that without more effective ventilation they risk driving away non-smoking customers and losing their lucrative trade in pub meals. Many have signed up to the Public Places Charter designed to promote self-regulation and avoid political intervention.

Politicians are caught between the economic and health arguments. 130 MPs signed an Early Day Motion in



January to try and force through a more draconian Code of Practice, drawn up by the Health & Safety Commission, that puts the onus on employers to enforce smoking bans - or come up with a watertight argument for not doing so. However, supporters of the charter felt betrayed by this action.

"We are making good progress on the charter ... standards are undoubtedly rising with greater investment in good ventilation and installation of non-smoking areas," said Nick Bish, chief executive of the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers. "More regulation in this area will only add



confusion. We made an agreement with the Department of Health over the charter and should be given time to deliver it."

Other observers are concerned that building operators could be panicked by the threat of regulation into selecting the wrong technical solution.

"There is a danger that licensees will rush into spending money on equipment that does not work and doesn't help them meet the guidelines," said Densley James, engineering product designer at Galixbrook Engineering.

"The guidelines require all operators of public places that allow smoking to bring in at least 30m<sup>3</sup> of outside air per person per hour and balance this with extract. This is sensible and provides a far more comfortable environment for staff and customers – but it is easy to get this wrong and end up with freezing customers in winter.

"With a reasonable timescale, licensees and groups can invest in technology that works which will be to everyone's benefit – smokers and non-smokers."

And there is the 'business case' too. People are less likely to want to eat in a smoky atmosphere, whether they are smokers or not, so many publicans are embracing the charter as it allows them to keep smoking in their premises, but improve food sales and staff happiness by overhauling their ventilation systems.

In the workplace, productivity is the issue that is focusing employers' minds as well as the need to avoid the growing number of legal actions taken by sufferers of the still largely mysterious Sick Building Syndrome.

The tobacco industry itself admits that around 50 million British working days are lost each year due to

**"More regulation will only add to the confusion"**

smoking related illness. This is thought to cost businesses about £4 billion per annum.

Bill Callaghan, chairman of the HSC, says they are not going to insist on total smoking bans in the Code of Practice.

"It will enable everyone – employers and employees, smokers and non smokers – to know exactly where they stand with regard to workplace smoking and ensure compliance with health and safety law," he said.

"We are not proposing a ban on smoking in workplaces. It is rather a recognition of the need to protect those workers exposed to environmental tobacco smoke and to build on existing good practice."

"I am aware that the introduction of an ACOP will require some, but not all, businesses to invest in measures that assist them in meeting its requirements. Nevertheless, I believe that the wider benefits, and particularly the welfare gains for those staff currently exposed to workplace tobacco smoke, make such expenditure worthwhile."

The options for smoking policies do include a complete ban but, where this is not practical, other measures can be introduced such as smoking areas or total segregation of smokers from non-smokers in separate rooms. A less drastic measure would be to invest in an air cleaner capable of removing the hazardous substances associated with tobacco smoke.

Air filtration specialist Interfilta claims that modern air cleaning units will effectively remove tobacco smoke, gases, and other airborne pollutants. It says that its Intercept air cleaner can remove the carcinogenic gases and other noxious substances associated with cancer and heart disease.

"Employers will have to toughen up on smoking or could face prosecution under the new proposals made by the HSC," advised Interfilta's Geoff Kelly. "We fully support the issues outlined in the code and Intercept is a cost-effective and efficient solution that removes the need for a total ban on smoking."

**Now turn to page 18 for news on major technical developments in filtration.**