

UB Puts Dust Busters to the Test

By Joyce Kryszak

AMHERST, NY (2006-07-18) We've all heard those disgusting reports about the dust mites and mold lurking in those seemingly beautiful hotel rooms. But there's new technology that's attempting to clean up even what you can't see. But UB scientists are putting the "allergy-friendly rooms" to the test.

They're in there all right. And we're not talking about the hotel guests. There are millions of bed bugs, mold spores and other nasty things you wouldn't want to sleep with. And no amount of housecleaning, in even the nicest hotels is going to chase them all out.

So, what's a weary traveler to do? Call dust busters.

Tom Pickles is director of operations for Pure Solutions. They're not really anything like the guys in the movie who carried around proton backpacks to get rid of slimy things. But the local company does have an arsenal of what they call seven different interventions.

The company uses the process, that combines chemistry and technology, to prevent or greatly reduce air born pollutants. Pickles said it's definitely needed especially in hotel rooms, where people aren't the only ones enjoying the fine linens.

O.k. that is gross. But don't pack for home just yet. Some hotels, such as the Buffalo Niagara Marriott, where we went for this story, are offering what indoor air experts are calling "allergy-friendly rooms."

The idea is to, first, literally shield everything in the room from microscopic mold and bacteria. Dr. Robert Baier heads the Industry University Center for Biosurfaces at UB. He said the room is misted with a chemical barrier.

But you're probably still wondering about all those dust mites? The experts agree some could still be hanging out.

So, mattresses and pillows are covered with tightly woven microfiber wraps that at least keep you from inhaling what those unwanted guests leave behind.

What does manage to break through all these barriers is then filtered away.

The advanced technology filters are used in air conditioning units and under the bed, constantly circulating the air and pulling out contaminants. Dr. Baier said that makes breathing a whole lot easier.

He said on a bad day, or in a room with poor air quality, lungs can get over taxed. And that means people get sick easier.

But scientists at UB want to make sure these new technologies are actually doing what the companies advertise.

A \$1.27 million state grant paid for the equipment being used for the testing.

Dr. Baier demonstrates the hand-held device used to sample the air. The readings indicate that the particle count does drop, about 75% once you leave the hallway and enter the purified room.

Still, he said more scientific tests will be done back at the UB lab on the actual air particles.

If tests bear out the claims, it will be good news for the hotel industry. And for the two local companies that supply the technologies, Pure Solutions and Indoor Air Professionals.

But Dr. Baier said scientists really want to find out is the process could be used in hospitals and other places where air quality is critical.

For now, industry officials are glad to be making hotel stays a bit more pleasant for travelers in several states around the country. Locally only the Hampton Inn and the Marriott offer the "allergy-friendly rooms." The cost to convert and maintain each room is roughly \$2,500 dollars.

The Marriott opened its five rooms about six weeks ago. Hotel Manager Dick Schroen believes the rooms will prove an inviting idea.

Right now, he said they sometimes offer the rooms for no extra charge - just to get people comfortable with the idea of being able to breathe a little easier.

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