



Media release

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## **WORK MAKING YOU SICK?**

### **Research shows indoor plants improve office health and wellbeing**

There's more to a green way to good health in the office than ensuring the air conditioning is free from contaminants and the wash rooms are cleaned daily.

Visiting Australian environmental professor Margaret Burchett says as little as a single potted plant in as small as a 20cm pot on an office worker's desk can reduce toxins from the air.

Dr Burchett has more than 40 years as a plant scientist and is in New Zealand next week (March 12 & 13) to talk about the extreme health benefits of indoor plants in the work environment.

She says international studies show plants in offices reduce stress and sickness absence by around 60 per cent in a planted office compared to an office with none.

"While buildings are getting healthier – and that's great news – our research shows plants can play a pivotal and affordable role in removing air-borne pollutants.

"The entire plant system - including leaves, roots and potting mix all help suck up the various different nasty gases released by furnishings, carpets, photocopiers and printers as well as imported pollutants released by outdoor products such as fossil fuel emissions.

"The important thing for managers is that plants in offices greatly improve indoor air quality and are therefore an investment in the health of workers and in productivity."

Dr Burchett says a February 2010 Australian study<sup>1</sup> which she conducted shows plants can also effect a highly significant improvement in the psychological wellbeing of office occupants.

“The report makes it clear that the presence of plants was also associated with LARGE reductions of negative mood compared to the no-plant controls, who became more stressed over the period,” she says.

“We found significant reductions by between 30 and 60 per cent in negative mood states and feelings of stress among participants with plants in their offices whereas such negative mood scores rose by 20-40% among participants with no plants.”

“Targeted horticultural technology can now be developed to optimise the use of plants to complement any engineering measures to improve indoor environmental quality in any building,” she says.

According to New Zealand’s leading provider of indoor plants for commercial premises, Ms Burchett’s research supports the argument that healthy work environments are good for business.

“The effect indoor plants have on employees can positively impact the bottom line of a business, particularly in office environments where people are using computers,” says **Ambius** spokesperson Tracy Stephen.

She says a study at Washington State University showcasing a windowless computer lab revealed when plants were present, occupants’ blood pressure readings were lower and they reported feeling more attentive than people in a room with no plants.

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<sup>1</sup> Greening the Great Indoors for Human Health & Wellbeing, Margaret Burchett et al, UTS

Dr Burchett, has more than 40 years experience as a plant scientist, with special expertise in the use of plants to indicate, reduce and control pollution, outdoors and inside. Currently she is chief investigator for University of Technology Sydney in the research on potted-plants to improve urban indoor environmental quality as well as a number of other leading environmental agencies.

In New Zealand, recognition of the role of indoor plants is growing, with the NZ Green Building Council now awarding up to two points towards green star ratings for interior plant installations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> New Zealand Green Building Council, Green Star NZ, Office Interiors Pilot, <http://www.nzgbc.org.nz/>