

HOWARD UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE FACULTY SENATE

PRESS RELEASE

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Building Damage Still Has Many Concerned It Will Never Be Repaired

Washington, D.C. (October 28, 2019) Faculty working in the chemistry building at Howard University received communications from the campus administration that there is not enough money in the budget to fix all of the leaky pipes and maintain climate control in the event of temperature extremes. The disastrous state of the air-conditioning during the summer has led to concerns that the situation may continue to get worse. The physical impacts of the extreme heat in the building has induced nose-bleeds and at least one student losing consciousness. Several faculty members have communicated to students that they may leave if the room gets too uncomfortable.

Chemistry faculty reporting this problem have said, "The inability of the administration to provide reasonable learning conditions for the students (and working conditions for faculty) places everyone involved at undue risk. The callous and indifferent response from campus leadership is inconsistent with excellence in truth and service."

Rather than subject students to undue physical and psychological stress, professors have sought creative solutions such as conducting virtual office hours or office hours in other buildings on days where inside air temperatures exceed 80 degrees. Others have moved classes to alternate spaces and conducted experiential labs that do not require students to have to 'tough it out' and risk heat-stroke in a poorly ventilated and inadequately cooled classroom. While there are no OSHA standards for indoor air temperature, the OSHA recommendation is for employers to maintain workplace temperatures between 68-76



degrees, and humidity in the range of 20 to 60 percent. Occupants of the chemistry building have routinely experienced temperatures exceeding 90 degrees and 65% humidity during the first month of the semester. There is apparently no solution for those same professors, as to where they sit.

Chemistry faculty have also asked, "How can we perform research under these conditions? What is the message being sent to students about the value the institution places on their welfare? What is the message being sent regarding the institutional stance on faculty welfare? Does it make sense for a building filled with toxic chemicals to lack climate control on the hottest days of the year? "

Similar issues are being experienced in other buildings across campus including the Graduate School and the Numa Adams buildings, where offices, classrooms and laboratories were left without appropriate cooling during the warmest time of the year. Additionally, faculty in the Adams Building have expressed concerns about air quality and ventilation. Ernest Just Hall has experienced insufficient air-conditioning, with laboratory temperatures reaching 89 degrees. In these cases students are encouraged to take water and cool air breaks throughout class periods. Faculty have purchased portable air conditioners, but these units can only do so much in relatively large research spaces with open flame.

"These units place additional loads on electrical systems," said one faculty, "that both internal and external electricians have stated need several additional circuits. Some of faculty feel that part of their jobs at Howard University during the summer and early fall is a battle to survive unhealthy environmental conditions until the summer heat finally gives way to cooler fall temperatures, typically by October."