

FILTRATION HOUR CALLS FOR GLOBAL ALIGNMENT ON IAQ GOVERNANCE

World Filtration Institute-hosted webinar highlights need for standards, data integrity and health-first approach to air quality management

By Karu Suren | Associate Editor, *Climate Control Middle East*

FILTRATION HOUR, the webinar by the World Filtration Institute (WFI), on February 19, underscored the growing complexity surrounding Indoor Air Quality (IAQ), and called for a transition towards more structured governance, standardisation and accountability. Held under the theme, 'Filtering the Air Quality Noise', the event, in panel discussion format, brought together specialists from academia, industry and media to examine the challenges posed by fragmented data, inconsistent standards and limited public awareness.

The event highlighted how IAQ remains widely overlooked, despite its critical role in human health. Dr Paula Olsiewski, Contributing Scholar, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, said: "Indoor air is invisible. Most people are not aware that they spend 90% of their time indoors." Olsiewski added that harmful pollutants, such as PM2.5, cannot be detected by human senses, which contributes to the lack of urgency in addressing IAQ.

Nick Agopian, President, Reviveaire, said society continues to prioritise other health metrics while neglecting the air people breathe. "We obsess over what we eat, yet we still treat the air inside our buildings as an afterthought," he



Top (L-R): Mike Malloy (Moderator, WFI; Principal, Malloy Strategies and Director of Communications, WFI); Mitch McCreary (Moderator and Director of Marketing, WFI) and Dr Iyad Al-Attar (Session Chair, WFI and Independent Air Filtration Consultant)

Bottom (L-R): Dr Paula Olsiewski (Contributing Scholar, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security - USA); Nick Agopian (President, Reviveaire LLC - USA); Suzana Vidaković (Filtration Expert - Germany); Heike Krüger (Honorary Board Chair, Nano-Control - Germany) and Surendar Balakrishnan (Co-Founder & Editorial Director, CPI Industry - UAE)

said. Agopian added that IAQ should be viewed as "the infrastructure of human performance", linking it to infection control, cognitive function and long-term health outcomes.

A central theme of the discussion was the need to shift from a focus on thermal comfort to a health-first approach in building design and operation. Agopian

said HVAC systems had historically been optimised for temperature and energy efficiency rather than human health. He said the industry must move "from design intent to verified outcomes", emphasising measurement, accountability and governance.

The panel also addressed the challenge of making IAQ measurable and

visible. Dr Olsiewski said decision-makers often demand proof before taking action, noting that policymakers frequently ask to “test the air” before implementing improvements. She added that improving filtration is a straightforward solution but requires greater awareness and validation.

The discussion highlighted the role of data integrity in addressing what panellists described as “air quality noise”. Agopian said the science and technology to measure pollutants already exist but lack alignment. “What is missing is how do we align all this together,” he said, referring to the need for standardised health targets, trusted sensor systems and economic models that incentivise better air quality.

Panellists also pointed to the complexity of indoor environments as a barrier to unified standards. Suzana Vidaković, a filtration specialist, said IAQ varies significantly, depending on building type, occupancy and activities. Vidaković said, “We cannot put those different environments into one bucket.” In saying so, she highlighted differences that exist among homes, industrial facilities and public spaces.

The panellists said economic considerations remain a key obstacle to progress. Agopian said energy efficiency standards gained prominence due to clear cost implications, whereas IAQ lacks comparable economic framing. He said policymakers are more responsive to “prescriptive” metrics such as energy use than to probabilistic health outcomes linked to air quality.

Heike Krüger, Honorary Board Chair, Nano-Control, said regulatory intervention is necessary to address indoor air pollution. She said, “We need mandatory rules for clean indoor air with clear binding limits for pollutants.” She added that IAQ should be recognised as a human right, noting that people spend the majority of their lives in enclosed environments.

The session also explored sources of indoor pollution, including those generated within buildings. Dr Olsiewski said common activities, such as printing, cooking or burning candles, can contribute to harmful emissions. She

said building occupants often don’t know they are creating harmful pollution, underscoring the need for education and behavioural change.

The panel examined the long-term health impacts of exposure to indoor pollutants. Agopian said IAQ issues often go unnoticed, because their effects are gradual. He said, “You don’t see the smoking gun,” adding that prolonged exposure can lead to respiratory, cardiovascular and cognitive health issues over time.

The webinar also addressed the absence of a unified global IAQ standard. Vidaković said the issue is compounded by technical complexity, economic barriers and lack of awareness. She added that responsibility for IAQ is distributed across multiple stakeholders, including individuals, building operators and governments, making regulation more challenging.

The webinar also highlighted the role of communication and media as a critical component in addressing the challenges surrounding IAQ. Surendar Balakrishnan, Co-Founder and Editorial Director, CPI Industry, publishers of Climate Control Middle East, said the current information ecosystem is characterised by excessive, fragmented and often unverified content, which contributes to confusion among stakeholders. He said: “We live in a time of media chatter, where authentic information is getting lost,” adding that the proliferation of data without adequate validation makes it difficult for decision-makers to distinguish between credible insights and noise. He said media professionals must move beyond simply reporting data and instead take on a more active role in interpreting and contextualising information. Balakrishnan added that effective communication requires translating complex scientific findings into clear, actionable narratives that can inform policy and public behaviour. He also said that responsible journalism has a role to play in holding stakeholders accountable and ensuring that air quality discussions remain grounded in evidence rather than driven by marketing claims or fragmented messaging.

The discussion also highlighted the need for continuous monitoring and responsive systems. Dr Iyad Al-Attar, independent air filtration consultant, who chaired the session, said improving IAQ requires integrated systems capable of responding dynamically to changes in environmental conditions. He said monitoring must extend beyond ambient air to include filtration performance and system outputs.

Circularity in filtration systems was another key theme. Vidaković said the industry should move towards performance-based models focused on delivering clean air rather than selling filters. “Do we really need to sell filters, or can we sell clean air?” she asked, adding that sensor integration could support lifecycle optimisation and reduce waste.

The panellists also discussed the relationship between ventilation and filtration. Agopian said the two approaches should be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. He added that filtration can be more cost-effective than ventilation in certain contexts, particularly when accounting for operational energy requirements.

The panellists identified governance, regulation and interdisciplinary collaboration identified as essential to progress. Krüger said addressing IAQ requires coordination among authorities, industry and scientific communities, supported by clear strategies for public communication.

The session concluded with a call for a fundamental shift in how IAQ is perceived and managed. Dr Olsiewski said, “We have to come up with ways of making IAQ visible to people who have no idea of how important this is.” Agopian added that the industry must decide whether to make IAQ a governed standard of care or not.

The webinar reinforced the need for global alignment across standards, technology and communication to address the challenges of IAQ effectively. [ccme](#)

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