

# Breathe Easy

Beware the air! If you're wheezing and sneezing, it could be the salon environment. How do you clean a surface you can't see?

By Rosanne Ullman



It was 2008 when Los Angeles hairdresser **Jordana Lorraine** decided to increase her knowledge about the air around her. Lorraine had good reason to be concerned about breathing in chemical vapors, sprays and dust. Hairdressing falls fourth on WebMD's list of "risky jobs for your lungs," and a study published in *Respiratory Care Journal* four years

ago concluded, "Hairdressing work is associated with a high frequency of work-exposure-related respiratory symptoms and, to a lesser extent, allergic symptoms." Hairdressers in this study exhibited lower lung function when compared with the general population, which can be an early sign of COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).

## Clearing the air

"One of the biggest challenges facing the professional beauty industry is the lack of ventilation," observes scientist **Doug Schoon**, president of Schoon Scientific and a regular consultant to the beauty industry. "If you build out your salon from a travel agency, you'll have different ventilation needs from the previous business, but that's often overlooked. Any irritation of the eyes, nose or throat—called 'sensory irritation'—indicates a ventilation problem."

Schoon cautions owners and technicians from taking a cavalier approach.

DO NOT think you can just:

**Open a window.** "That's circulation, not ventilation," Schoon explains. Although some fresh air does come in, it would take a very strong wind to partly replace the air that's already there.

**Rely on your nose.** Dust, as well as many harmful vapors, have no odor, and a fragrant hair spray can do as much damage as a foul-smelling odor. Schoon further cautions against purchasing any ventilation system that

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## Source Capture Ventilation

"It used to be that as long as you had enough fresh air coming in, you could open a salon," says **Jeff Cardarella**, president of **Aerovex Systems**. "But now there are regulations."

After first adapting source capture technology to nail stations, Aerovex expanded six years ago to providing source capture units for hair stations as well. This technology removes potentially harmful chemicals right where they're applied, before they have a chance to mix with the air and filter throughout the salon.

"It's all about protecting the breathing zone," Cardarella says. "It's appropriate for all chemical services and for biological pathogens, too. If someone sneezes, that gets pulled away from the stylist's space and destroyed."

The company's most advanced source capture systems, called Healthy Air, are quieter and easier to maintain with "plug-and-play cartridges" than earlier models. Cardarella says that a salon can achieve maximum protection by covering three zones—source capture for the breathing zone, air purification for the rest of the air in the salon and a heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) system equipped with a filter designed to remove salon vapors and dust. Salons that address all three zones receive a certification seal from Aerovex that they can place in the window.

"Protecting yourself also involves work practices and protocol," Cardarella adds. "Use a low- to medium-heat blow dryer setting for keratin treatments, don't place the dryer right on the head, apply only as much product as recommended, use a fine-tooth comb to remove excess product and wear nitrile gloves and glasses."

**"One of the biggest challenges facing the professional beauty industry is the lack of ventilation."**

—Doug Schoon

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## HEALTHY HAIRDRESSER



Jordana Lorraine

touts an “ozone” solution, which he says covers up the odor but does not eliminate it. “Ozone is a powerful lung irritant,” Schoon adds. “So you’re potentially putting harmful ozone into the air just to get rid of odors.”

**Get used to it.** In the morning, you might notice an odor that’s been hovering all night long, but after you’ve been in the salon for a while you no longer smell it. Schoon says that’s called olfactory fatigue. The nose is forgiving—you no longer notice the odor, but it’s still there.

**Joke about it.** “When a client complains about an odor, that’s a signal that your ventilation isn’t good,” Schoon says. “Don’t respond, ‘Smells like money to me!’ Take it seriously.” You never know when a client might even sue you for causing a respiratory condition.

Lorraine, a texture specialist, didn’t joke; she researched. An engineer friend told her to look for “source capture ventilation,” so the Googling began, leading Lorraine to

the Aerovex system.

“I didn’t know what I was looking for, but when I saw it I knew that’s what I needed,” Lorraine says. “Aerovex was way ahead of me. They’d already adapted this concept to the salon environment. The equipment hangs right over the head and captures the vapors and fumes.” She persuaded the owner of her salon to purchase one unit that all of the stylists shared. When she left to become an independent contractor, she purchased a newer model on her own, and she markets the clean air as one of the salon’s benefits.

While OSHA requires salons to provide a safe environment for everyone on the premises, the government does not employ enough inspectors to monitor compliance.

“It’s up to the owner and stylists to read OSHA’s safety data sheets to learn more about the products you’re using,” says Shoon, who consults with Aerovex in product development. Overall, manufacturers have been responsible, he adds. But responsibility does not end with the manufacturer.

“The problem is that stylists fail to follow manufacturers’ instructions, or they dismiss warnings that are on the label,” Schoon says. “Those instructions and warnings are there for a reason. ‘Apply sparingly’ means that you can’t predict the consequences if you use more than recommended.”

Lorraine is confident that, in addition to protecting herself and her assistant, she’s addressing an important customer service issue.

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