

Physical Causes of Oppressive Feelings

by Joe Wetterling

Often, both clients and investigators describe "oppressive" feelings at a particular location. Both myself, to a lesser degree, and my wife, to a greater, have experienced these sensations. They might include feelings of pressure on your head, shoulders, or chest; shortness of breath; headache or dizziness; and others. Aside from spiritual/paranormal and psychological explanations, one area that should always be considered is the physical.

Oppressive feelings may be caused by things present in the physical environment. Checking for these physical factors - carbon monoxide, mold, ozone and, possibly, EMF - not only can eliminate a paranormal explanation but are important safety precautions in *any* home.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is odorless, colorless, and impossible to taste or smell. At lower levels of exposure, CO can cause flu-like symptoms, including headaches, dizziness, disorientation, nausea and fatigue. At higher levels, CO exposure can be fatal, which provides another excellent reason to check for its presence when these symptoms are presented.

Sources of carbon monoxide include unvented space heaters, blocked or leaking chimneys, leaking furnaces, gas water heaters, and automobiles in attached garages. An area exposed to CO must be evacuated and ventilated; further exposure can only be prevented by eliminating the source of the gas. Carbon monoxide detectors are available at most home stores and general department stores, produced by companies like Kidde and First Alert. The instructions on an individual product must be consulted if an investigative group plans to bring one with them; those I've used have specified that they should be left in place (in other words, purchased by a homeowner rather than brought in by a visitor).

Mold

Molds of various types can be found anywhere there is sufficient moisture and can grow on almost an unlimited number of materials. Molds are allergens and can cause allergic reactions, asthma, and other respiratory problems. Allergic reaction varies for each individual but can include nasal congestion, irritated eyes or skin, or wheezing. Fewer people have severe reactions, but it is possible for mold exposure to cause fever and shortness of breath, as well.

Molds can grow on nearly any surface where there is enough moisture. The only way, then, to stop the growth of mold is to eliminate the moisture. In some locations that investigators find themselves - ruins and buildings near natural water sources - the source of moisture cannot be removed; investigators should be mindful of this and consult a physician or allergist if exposure is a serious concern.

Depending on the severity and type(s) of mold, abatement can be done by the property owner or through a professional service. More information can be found in the EPA publication, "A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home", which is available on their site (www.epa.gov/mold/images/moldguide.pdf).

Ozone

Ozone is a colorless gas that many have heard of in a positive light - the ozone layer that protects us from dangerous solar radiation. Indeed, ozone is beneficial in the atmosphere, but it does not belong in occupied areas, where it poses a danger.

Exposure to ozone can cause numerous respiratory ailments, including throat irritation, coughing, chest pain, and shortness of breath. It will also aggravate the symptoms of those with asthma and other respiratory problems. Longer-term exposure can cause permanent damage, including decreases in lung function and weakened defense against respiratory infection.

Some households and businesses have begun using ozone generators to clear and freshen the indoor air. Ozone generators, which intentionally produce the gas ozone, are often sold as air cleaners despite the dangers of ozone exposure.

"Some vendors suggest that these devices have been approved by the federal government for use in occupied spaces. To the contrary, NO agency of the federal government has approved these devices for use in occupied spaces."¹

"There is evidence to show that at concentrations that do not exceed public health standards, ozone is not effective at removing many odor-causing chemicals... (and) does not effectively remove viruses, bacteria, mold, or other biological pollutants."²

The simplest way to avoid ozone exposure is to remove the devices that generate it. Air cleaners that produce ozone - even those that claim to produce within acceptable ranges - should not be used in the home. Enclosure in a small room, especially, concentrates the gas and may increase the effects. Property owners can be directed to more information at the U.S. Government's Ozone and Your Health brochure (<http://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=static.brochure>).

Electromagnetic Fields (EMF)

"When you hear about EMFs in the news, the term usually refers to electric and magnetic fields at extremely low frequencies such as those associated with the use of electric power. The term EMF can be used in a much broader sense as well, encompassing electromagnetic fields with low or high frequencies."³

Much of the evidence is anecdotal - high EMF readings measured in cases where a) physical symptoms were reported and b) no other external cause was found. Our field is wrought with anecdotal evidence and most investigators are used to working on nothing but experiences and stories, in many cases.

"There are currently no [household] US standards for exposure to low-frequency fields. However, some... evidence suggests that when the general level of 60-Hz fields exceeds 2 milligauss, there is an increased cancer risk... Typical home environments (not close to appliances or power lines) are in the range of 0.1-0.5 milligauss."⁴

Scientists have investigated the possibility that some people are "electrosensitive" and are allergic, so to speak, to EMF. Preliminary experiments have not demonstrated a link between EMF exposure and "allergic" symptoms. While science can certainly be wrong and further consideration is warranted, I recommend evaluating other physical causes first, so as not to overlook something known to be hazardous.

Additional information can be obtained from The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences' EMF RAPID (<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/emfrapid>).

References

1. US EPA. "Ozone Generators that are Sold as Air Cleaners: An Assessment of Effectiveness and Health Consequences". Online, accessed 6/19/2006. <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/ozonegen.html>
Also see US EPA's Indoor Air Quality site: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/index.html>
2. Ibid.
3. The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). "Questions and Answers - EMF in the Workplace". Online, accessed 6/19/2006. <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/emfrapid/html/Q&A-Workplace.html>
4. National Association for Amateur Radio. "RF Radiation and Electromagnetic Field Safety" Online, accessed 6/19/2006. <http://www.arrl.org/news/rfsafety/hbkrf.html>

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