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County seeks air purifying solutions

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Chief Medical and Science Advisor for Active Pure Technologies, Dr. Deborah Birx

As we enter the cold, flu and COVID season, Charleston County is paving the way in public health by becoming one of the first municipalities in the world to ensure the air in public buildings is truly clean and safe.

Four and a half years after the onset of COVID-19, it has become evident that many buildings lack the technology needed to prevent airborne transmission of not only COVID, but also flu, RSV and other dangerous infections. In the aftermath of the pandemic, Charleston County began to search for ways to improve the air quality in many of its public buildings.

Phil Sabatino, Charleston County's Facilities Management Director, was already working with HVAC companies to develop strategies on how to enhance air quality and air purification in public buildings.

“We were looking for ways to improve our air quality,” Sabatino said. “Unfortunately there were a lot of companies out there coming at us left and right and my biggest concern was efficacy.”

In the years following the pandemic many companies claimed to have created technology that could be used to improve the air quality in indoor spaces, but according to Sabatino, many of them lacked the data they needed to support their claims. So when Sabatino joined a call with a Dallas-based firm called Active Pure Technologies, he initially didn't think much of it, but soon realized that this company was different.

In 2021, Amy Carenza joined Active Pure Technologies along with the former White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx. Together, they led the opening call that Sabatino had joined at the urging of the Charleston County Administrator.

This would be the turning point for Sabatino and his team in their search for a company that could help with their effort to improve the air quality in Charleston County.

“I became very interested in [the ActivePure] technology because they had proven results with a lot of data [to back it up],” Sabatino said.

When Carezza, Chief Commercial Officer of Active Pure Technologies, and Birx, Chief Medical and Science Advisor for Active Pure Technologies, joined the company in 2021, the company had already conducted years of research. They had also spent millions to get their product to a safety and efficacy point where it could earn FDA clearance.

“When Dr. Birx and I joined the team, we had a commercially viable product that had made it through FDA clearance, but that is when the real work began,” Carezza said.

“At this point, people trusted our technology enough to allow us into their offices and their patient care areas and we had to demonstrate the outcomes. Not only is that a high stakes set up, but it's something that takes years to prove. [We] are talking about years of longitudinal data, and that is what he had to have to get published. [We had] over 60 months of longitudinal data where we were able to prove a reduction in healthcare acquired infections of 70 percent in two separate hospitals in two separate states.”

With this new information at their disposal, Sabatino and his team were able to conduct their own research into Active Pure and the products that they offered.

“Charleston was very distinguished throughout this whole process,” Carenza said. “Dr. Birx and I had calls with the leadership team of Charleston County for a year. It was a very coordinated and collaborative process; they had stakeholders from every department. They wanted the insides of every single department in the decision making.

“With each call, it sort of felt like their questions got harder and harder and harder. You could tell that they were consulting with experts and we so appreciated that because their relentlessness in research made us stronger, made us better, helped us become better communicators, and helped us understand and anticipate thoughts and concerns.”

After nearly a year of back-and-forth communication, Sabatino and his team decided to move ahead and install the Active Pure products in several county buildings. Currently there are five buildings throughout the county that use the technology: the Lonnie Hamilton Public Services Building, the Social Services Hub, the East Cooper Service Center, the Ravenel Service Center and a number of magistrate courtrooms.

“It has been very successful for the county,” Sabatino said. “We have had individuals that have reported back to my maintenance staff when they go through saying that they feel better and that they have been less sick. We are hearing these occupant good news stories, so we are going to continue to implement it [in more buildings].”

Essentially the Active Pure product is able to add to indoor air what the sun naturally does to outdoor air.

“That is exactly what Active Pure does,” Birx said. “It creates the molecules in a proprietary way that go into the air and attack bacterial viruses and fungal membranes just like the energy of the sun does. Over time this will become the technology that allows America to never worry about having to utilize masks again because we won’t have to worry about getting flu in our grocery store. Charleston will be the one place that it will be safe to go in these municipal buildings when we have [another] outbreak.”

The County is currently focusing on buildings that have the highest volume of people passing through them, but hopes to implement the Active Pure technology in other buildings in the near future.

#CharlestonCounty #PhilSabatino #DeborahBirx #AmyCarenza #COVID19 #Pandemic #CharlestonNews