

Why being cooped up is bad for you

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Ten years ago, many staff parked at work, hung their coats in a cloakroom, ate lunch in a canteen and enjoyed personal office space. But as property prices have reached their zenith, we're feeling the pinch in places other than our mortgage repayments. Millennial employers get a parking spot on their dreams. Work with coats and bags trampled underfoot, eat at their desks, and share cubicles with the rest of the office.

As employers are increasingly desperate to get the most out of every square foot, staff facilities such as canteens and cloakroom are often the first to be dispensed with. In fact, anyone who works in a contemporary office can tell you what it's like to work nose-to-tail with colleagues while fighting for a space in the office car park. The irony is that most of us are entitled to a great deal more space than we're getting, but we're often unaware of the law supporting us.

...While employees don't tend to know that they are even entitled to minimum space requirement in the workplace, even fewer are aware if their additional rights to certain facilities. According to the regulations, staff should be given adequate cloakroom facilities to hang their outerwear, and in the case of workplaces where staff would need to change into a uniform, adequate changing and storage facilities for their clothes. The problem is that while factories and shops often accommodate this requirement, workplaces such as offices seem to have been gradually squeezing them out.

.....Interestingly as eating facilities have dwindled, so working through lunch has risen. And it doesn't take a genius to figure out that if staff have no area in which to eat, they are more likely to eat at their desk or skip lunch altogether. As any employee who has eaten lunch at their desk knows, it then becomes much harder for other staff to know you are technically on a break, and so the boundaries of free time and work time become blurred with queries and phone calls.

Clearly this is also disadvantageous for employers, who won't be getting the best of their staff. "Put simply, they're just bad employers," says architect Hugh Anderson about firms which flout the space regulations. His workplace architectural business **haa design** is routinely called in to help employers make the most of their space. He maintains that not only do many companies squeeze staff space and facilities, they're even managing to waste spaces as they do so.

A lot of employers approach the problem of space by eating away at what their staff have got, which also erodes quality," says Anderson. "But actually many workplaces are very inefficient in how they use space, and they can actually reduce the space their staff have, while making them more comfortable, and adding facilities at the same time."

In addition he draws attention to the poor storage and excessive quantities of paper stocked by so called millennial workplaces. "Often you'll have the same piece of paper stored three times in three different places, when there is no need for it to exist in hard copy at all," he explains. "But all this unnecessary space taken up literally falls between the stools because no-one knows who's responsible for it."