

Some days after rain soaked a carpet at her office, an MTA employee became ill with a respiratory infection. A doctor traced her bronchitis to a specific airborne fungus. Using high-tech air monitoring equipment at the worksite, MTA Industrial Hygienist Collins Kalu found traces of the toxic aspergillus fungus. He ordered the carpet cleaned and disinfected. The employee was treated for the ailment and soon recovered.

**Industrial Hygienist is  
'Silent Protector'  
of MTA Employees**

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Nov. 12, 2002) At the very top of MTA's Headquarters building, in a room lined with cabinets crammed with scientific instruments, the rare visitor gets a glimpse of one of the agency's most important health and safety programs.

Presiding over the laboratory is Collins Kalu, 45, a native of Nigeria and a respected professional who joined MTA in 1988 following two years as an industrial hygienist and hazardous materials specialist for the state.

"This is the pulse, the heartbeat of MTA's industrial hygiene program," Kalu says of the 26th floor lab, where he can analyze air, water and soil samples and test chemicals for toxicity.

His work in the lab backs up the field tests he performs in his role of helping minimize hazards for MTA employees and customers. He frequently responds to requests from operating divisions, construction sites and other MTA facilities.

Kalu can evaluate, for example, the engineering design of a ventilation system or the environmental conditions in a workplace or aboard Metro Buses and Metro Rail trains. He is heavily involved in ensuring that MTA complies with federal, state and local environmental regulations.

**The 'silent protector'**

"Collins has a critical responsibility for protecting the health of our



Industrial Hygienist Collins Kalu calibrates an air sampling machine in his laboratory atop MTA Headquarters.

**Snapshot**



Senior Industrial Hygienist Collins Kalu

Native of Nigeria

**Degrees:** BS and MS, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety, Cal State Northridge.

Post-graduate work, Engineering, USC

**Certifications:** Registered Environmental Assessor, Certified Professional Environmental Auditor, Underground Tunnel Gas Tester and Safety Representative, EPA Asbestos Project Designer, State of California Hazardous Material First Responder

**Family:** He and his wife, Paulina, a chemistry teacher, have three children, Uzoma, 14, Michelle, 6, and Michael, 5.



Collins Kalu describes his lab work to Deputy CEO John Catoe.

employees by being what I call the 'silent protector' of the agency," says Michael Koss, executive officer, Risk Management.

So convinced is Koss of the importance of MTA's industrial hygiene and environmental safety program that he plans to add at least one, and probably two, hygienists to the staff by the end of next year.

One focus of the expanded staff will be reducing repetitive motion injuries, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, by improving the ergonomics of employees' workstations.

MTA is a leader among transit and governmental agencies that have industrial hygiene programs, says Koss. Kalu has worked with LADOT, NYC Transit, Cal OSHA and the California Air Resources Board. His primary focus, however, remains MTA.

"We want a work environment in which employees can feel assured that the air we breathe, the water we drink and the chemicals we use are safe," says Deputy CEO John Catoe. "Collins is the one who makes sure that happens."

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