

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN

COLLEGIAN

Homepage

Science

Physiology Building linked to unexplained health issues in staff, students

Paige Gruber, Staff Reporter
September 25, 2024



Collegian | Samantha Nordstrom
Colorado State University workers wearing protective suits and masks move boxes in the Physiology Building following university health protocol Sept. 20.

Students and staff in the Physiology Building at Colorado State University have experienced respiratory and eye irritation symptoms since early summer, which has significantly slowed research. While the university has hired a third party, [Gallagher Bassett](#), to investigate, frustration continues to mount as many feel the response to these urgent concerns has been too slow.

Tara Nordgren, associate professor in CSU's environmental and radiological health sciences department, has been operating her lab and office in the building since September 2021. Nordgren first learned about the issue July 1, when her lab was told by the university that equipment wasn't allowed to be removed due to several individuals filing worker's compensation complaints.

Ad

Although numerous labs in the building ceased operations July 1, the building remained open to the public until Sept. 13.

Gallagher Bassett is conducting an investigation in the building to determine the cause of the reported symptoms. They are working alongside [Chemistry & Industrial Hygiene, Inc.](#), which is testing for mold and other potential hazards.

"Gallagher Bassett focuses on the well-being of all our claimants and sets best practices for industry standards as it relates to filing claims and other business operations," said Jennifer Marshall, media relations director at Gallagher. "We do not comment on specific claims or clients."

Nordgren said approximately 70% of people working in her lab have also experienced symptoms, which range from eye irritation to respiratory symptoms.

"I had pretty substantial pain in my eyes (and) blurriness to the point where I had double vision in my left eye for over a day," Nordgren said. "My symptoms resolved as I stopped working in the building."

Katriana Popichak, assistant professor in CSU's microbiology, immunology and pathology department, has also experienced symptoms from working in the building.

"I experienced recurring headaches," Popichak said. "I kept waking up in the middle of the night coughing because my throat was irritated. I had to get throat-numbing spray."

Similar to Nordgren's situation, when Popichak stopped working in the building, her symptoms resolved. The implications of this situation extend beyond health concerns.

"My lab is operating at 20% capacity," Nordgren said. "We have equipment that is specific to our research that we can't access because the building is closed."

Ad

This has greatly impeded research progress and impacted graduate students who are struggling to finish their projects on schedule. The stagnation in research also postpones their ability to apply for and secure grants, complicating their academic paths even further.

"This issue has severely limited what I can do," Ph.D. student Alissa Threatt said. "We were allowed some equipment out of the Physiology Building about two months ago, but now we've exhausted those materials. We are constantly having to wait to reorder things that we would otherwise have access to."

While the environmental health and radiological sciences department is providing a fund to purchase some supplies, there's only so much they can do on their own.

"We need the people who have the authority to put us into a new lab space to get renovations done, to push for a better response (and) to be there for us," Threatt said.

Many staff and students reported that the university responded with resistance, and there is a general lack of awareness regarding the issue among students and staff.

"Several people had to file worker's compensation complaints to get the university to take the situation seriously," Nordgren said.

People began reporting symptoms as early as mid-May, so the closure of the building in September is seen as a delayed response by those most impacted by the situation.

"I wanted the university to take immediate action and hire a third party much sooner," Threatt said. "These investigations can take a really long time. As a lab, we are in limbo, and when people are getting sick unaware of the cause, that also impacts their care and their prognosis."

In response to the incidents, the university provided a statement to *The Collegian*.

"Over the last several months, the university has tested 37 samples and enlisted a third party for additional testing," the [statement](#) reads. "Results to date have not identified findings outside of normal range. ... Due to reduced activity and foot traffic in the building, access has been limited to those with key cards."

Now that a third party has been hired to investigate the root cause of the problem, there is hope that the causative agent will be found, the issue will be resolved and the labs displaced from the building can be moved to a new space to continue research progress.

"I don't think we should congratulate someone for meeting standards," Ph.D. student Logan Dean said. "If employees are getting sick at work, it reflects on management. It's their responsibility to ensure a healthy environment."

Nordgren said she hopes the investigation into the issue will yield results and allow operations to resume.

"I hope they can identify the cause of these issues," Nordgren said. "It would be incredibly validating to know what's making us sick. Ultimately, it will be a financial decision for the university whether they choose to mitigate the problems in the building or decide to tear it down."

Reach Paige Gruber at science@collegian.com or on Twitter [@CSUCollegian](https://twitter.com/CSUCollegian).

View Comments (3)

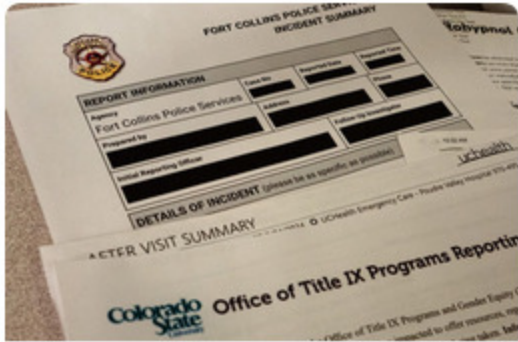
More in Homepage



CSU volleyball's comeback falls short as Boise State prevails in 5-set thriller



CSU soccer blows lead late, draws against Boise State



It's going to happen to someone else': Students allege use of date-rape drugs at off-campus fraternity parties, accuse CSU of inaction

More in Science



3rd annual Rocky Mountain Biological Anthropology Association conference hosts student research

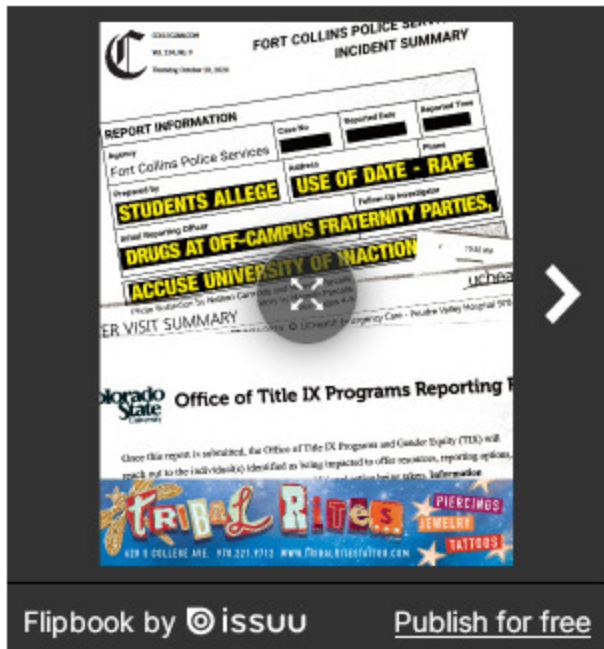


Clark's asbestos abatement process is no public health concern



CSU students search for antibiotics amid global health crisis

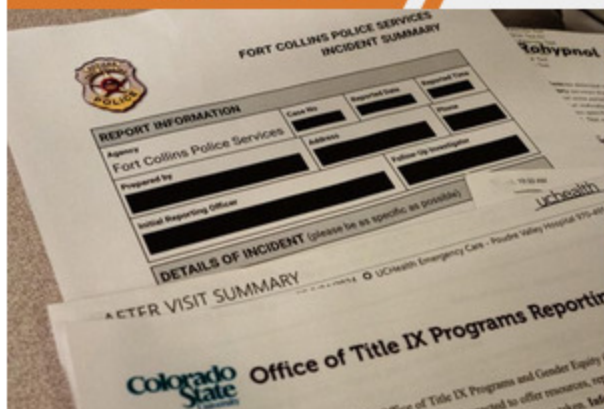
Print Edition



Letter to the editor submissions

Have a strong opinion about something happening on campus or in Fort Collins? Want to respond to an article written on The Collegian? Write a Letter to the Editor by following the guidelines [here](#).

Trending Stories



It's going to happen to someone else': Students allege use of date-rape drugs at off-campus fraternity parties, accuse CSU of inaction

Editor's Note: Trigger warning: This story contains mentions of nonconsensual drug use and references...



Miller: Walrus Ice Cream isn't very good

Editor's Note: All opinion section content reflects the views of the individual author only and does...



Lopez: CSU marching band needs to move out of student section

Editor's Note: All opinion section content reflects the views of the individual author only and does...

Follow Us on Twitter

SPONSORED CONTENT

Converting DWG to PDF Without Losing Detail: A Quality Assurance Guide

October 9, 2024

If you are an architect, designer, engineer, or other professional dealing with two- and three-dimensional data and metadata, you may often encounter...

Tackling College Football and Financial Management at CSU Fort Collins

October 1, 2024

Five Famous Sons From the Colorado State Rams Football Team

September 25, 2024

3 Reasons Colorado State Will Win or Lose in 2024

September 10, 2024



This publication is not an official publication of Colorado State University, but is published by an independent corporation using the name The Rocky Mountain Collegian pursuant to a license granted by CSU. Approximately 50% of Rocky Mountain Student Media Corp's income is provided by the Associated Students of Colorado State University (ASCSU) for the purpose of fostering student careers post-college and greater campus awareness and engagement.

Go to www.rockymountainstudentmedia.com for more information. Rocky Mountain Student Media is a registered 501(c)(3). EIN: 20-5998541

Rocky Mountain Student Media Corporation

Lory Student Center, Room 118
Colorado State University, 8038
Fort Collins, CO, 80523

Editor in Chief: Allie Seibel
editor@collegian.com

Advertise With Us

Classifieds

Contact Us

Collegian Take-Down Policy

Copyright Notice

MEDIA

RMSMC Corporate Info

CTV

KCSU

College Avenue Magazine

Tree Stump Films

Collegian Print Archives (2012 - Pre-

Collegian Archives (2012 - Present)

Collegian Prior Archives

Fifty03 Visuals

Subscribe

OTHER

CSU Parent & Family Calendar

CSU Visitor's Guide

CSU Graduation Edition

Best Of CSU

CSU Guide To Fraternity And Sorority

CSU Housing Guide

Ram Life

CSU Life

SPONSORED CONTENT

[Letter to the Editor guidelines](#)