

COALITION FOR HEALTHIER SCHOOLS

Fix America's Schools Today Act of 2011 (FAST Act)

Technical Comments on S 1597/Harkin and on HR 2948/DeLauro

...providing the platform and the forum for environmental health at school since 2001...

10-26-2011

The Coalition supports the need for \$25 billion in federal health and safety repair funds for public schools. We also urge that the final bill include provisions to ensure that the health of school children and other occupants are protected from well-documented construction/renovation hazards, including toxic chemicals used in building materials, and that funds be directed at facility features documented as directly impacting occupant health, attendance, achievement, and productivity. **The Coalition has estimated that 60% of the nation's school children are at elevated risk of health and learning problems due solely to the environmental conditions of their schools.**



New York City summer school for teens with multiple disabilities under renovation while in session (August 2008)

“Parents should be outraged,” says National Association of School Nurses. NASN survey of its members found that 40% of nearly 400 nurses surveyed said they knew children affected by pollutants in schools; 75% said schools had no Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Plans. See

http://www.nasn.org/Portals/0/releases/2011_01_11_NASN_HSN.pdf

“Our nation's schools are the daytime home to our children. It's where they learn, grow, eat and play. Hazards and unsafe conditions...can lead to a rise in health risks and illness...” Georges Benjamin, MD, Executive Director, American Public Health Association (2011).

We urge members of Congress to consider the following improvements to FAST:

- **IAQ Management Plans.** Schools receiving federal funds should be required to have an Indoor Air Quality Management Plan in place during the renovation of occupied buildings. US EPA has a best practice in *IAQ Tools for Schools* voluntary kit, and several states have adopted policies, including hosting a public meeting in advance of construction to present how the plan will protect occupants in all phases of work, including maintaining fire safety, ventilation, and building security.
- **Require facilities be adequately maintained.** The bill language should clearly require schools receiving federal funds to comply with state and local laws on school environments: these may include IPM, IAQ, security, emergency plans, green cleaning, lead-safe renovations, drinking water, asbestos, radon, etc.
- **State funds – allowable uses.** Facility Assessments. Specifically require states to conduct a comprehensive assessment of facilities, identifying facility conditions that can adversely affect student and staff health, safety, performance, or productivity, or energy, water, or materials efficiency; and other needed facility improvements. Training. Allow state funds for seeding and conducting training programs for school facility workers in maintaining advanced building technologies, and in best practices for routine cleaning of large-scale facilities.

- **Reduce indoor health hazards by design.** Avoid introducing new problems. Encourage designs that make schools easy to clean and maintain. Encourage design and materials considerations, such as selection and substitution of safer products and materials (*ex.: toxic, carcinogenic, bioaccumulative, endocrine disrupting, or chemicals that are reproductive toxicants or that cause asthma*), and implementation of improved maintenance and operational procedures to reduce or eliminate student or staff exposures during/after renovation to: volatile organic compounds, other hazardous chemicals (glues, paints, roofing materials); particles such as dusts, pollens, and damp/moldy building materials; or combustion gases.
- **Green Cleaning – no federal funding.** Since New York State, which enacted the nation’s first green cleaning law in 2005, reported that in 3.5 years of implementation not one agency or district complained of new costs, and districts nationwide are reporting savings of up to 30% in cleaning costs, federal funds are not needed for green cleaning.

The national Coalition for Healthier Schools, with hundreds of health, environment, education, parent, and community organizational members nationwide, supports federal funding to rebuild America’s public schools. In 2001, The Coalition helped win \$1.2 billion for public school health and safety repairs; in 2002 it supported Education’s authorization to promote Healthy High Performance Schools design (NCLB) with voluntary state grants; in 2007 it secured EPA’s authorization (EISA) to issue federal guidelines and voluntary state agency grants.

References

Renovation hazards:

- Berlin, CT school renovation fumes prompt evacuation: <http://berlin.ctcitizens.com/story/mcgee-evacuated-twice-week-parents-are-angry>
- New York State law on renovation of schools and occupants http://www.p12.nysed.gov/facplan/Laws_Regs/8NYCRR155.htm#_155_2_Constr_and_Remodel_of_Schl_Facilities, see Section 155.5
- US EPA *IAQ Tools for Schools* renovation guidance: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schooldesign/renovation.html>
- Tips for school construction, US EPA/Region Ten (Pacific Northwest) http://www.epa.gov/region10/pdf/publications/healthy_school_news_fall2011.pdf

Reducing hazards by design: Collaborative for High Performance Schools, <http://chps.net/dev/Drupal/node/445>

Green Cleaning: <https://greencleaning.ny.gov/> and www.CleaningforHealthySchools.org

Impacts on children: see *Sick Schools 2009: America’s Continuing Environmental Health Crisis for Children*, a national collaborative report with state by state data and policy profiles, from the Coalition for Healthier Schools, at http://www.healthyschools.org/SICK_SCHOOLS_2009.pdf

For more information, see www.HealthySchools.org > Coalition, or contact Claire Barnett at 202-543-7555, or email at info@healthyschools.org