

# **INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

## **OREGON HEALTHY SCHOOLS ROUNDTABLE**

**JUNE 28TH, 2001 – PORTLAND, OREGON**

**CO-SPONSORED BY**

**THE INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND  
THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, REGION 10**

### **NOTES**

Objectives of the roundtable meeting:

- To convene diverse constituencies committed to protecting children's environmental health in schools;
- To highlight a broad range of environmental health concerns that can undermine children's health while at school;
- To review and coordinate existing resources and initiatives;
- To identify resource gaps in funding, data, and programs and begin to identify how to address these;
- To begin to devise a prioritized regional action plan for minimizing and preventing environmental health risks in schools.

Roundtable participants represented a broad range of experience and perspectives. During introductions, participants noted a variety of concerns as having motivated their interest in working toward a statewide action plan for environmental health in Oregon schools. Concerns highlighted by participants included:

- Indoor air quality
- Childhood asthma
- Indoor and outdoor pesticide use
- Poor air quality in the I-5 Corridor
- Equity across school districts
- Aging buildings
- Lack of daylight in schools
- Lack of funding for repairs
- Unsafe radon levels
- Poor drinking water quality in schools
- Hazardous waste management and disposal
- Lack of information for parents
- Chemical use and lack of inventories
- Pesticide use in parks adjacent to schools
- Lack of local funding sources
- Pop machines/corporate influence in schools
- PCB's in light ballasts

- Lack of environmental education in schools
- Carpets as source of poor indoor air quality
- Lack of student health care

## **Keynote**

Angelo Bellomo

Director of Environmental Health and Safety

Los Angeles Unified School District

Mr. Bellomo has worked in the environmental health field for over 25 years. Before coming to the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), he directed toxic and hazardous waste control offices for both Los Angeles County and California EPA, managing regulatory programs for site remediation, chemical emergency response, and enforcement. Subsequently, he consulted for numerous clients both nationally and internationally on matters of environmental health and safety.

The LAUSD is the second largest school district in the country. While Mr. Bellomo acknowledged that some of the issues faced in LA may not exist in Oregon, he emphasized the need to share knowledge and strategies across the board and expressed eagerness to both share his experiences working in LA and hear from Roundtable participants about the issues facing Oregon.

Mr. Bellomo expressed that any environmental condition present in a school that interferes with the education process has to be addressed. And he emphasized the need for broad public education and outreach on environmental health issues in schools. He noted that in his experience, there is a substantial difference between what parents believe to be happening in their child's schools (with respect to environmental health) and what is actually happening. When parents do become informed, he noted, this often leads to more aggressive public campaigns and eventually more positive action toward change.

Bellomo highlighted several areas of work he is focusing on with the LAUSD:

**School Siting.** Bellomo noted that requiring an appropriately rigorous review before constructing a school at a given site is a means of stopping future health and safety problems before they begin. California has recently passed legislation requiring such a review process for new schools. Criteria that are reviewed include proximity to railroads, roadways, waste disposal sites, and other potential pollution sources as well as the historic use of the property.

**Asbestos and Lead Hazards.** These hazards are exacerbated during renovation projects in older buildings, noted Bellomo. Making certain that contractors know they are ultimately responsible for following proper abatement and control protocols and that they will be held accountable can help to minimize the risk. For this strategy to be successful, he added, there must be a reasonable level of surveillance of the contractors' work and there must be relatively severe consequences for not complying with the required protocols. In a large district like LA, disqualifying contractors who do not adhere to

guidelines from competing for future school district contracts proves to be a powerful incentive.

**Routine Health and Safety Inspections.** Bellomo is spearheading an effort not only to institute a system of routine health and safety inspections in every school in the district but also to establish a database that will house these baseline data on the state of the facility of each school – information that will ultimately be made available to the general public. He noted that the guidelines that will be used for these routine inspections are in the final stages of review and should be available for reference in the near future. Bellomo also explained that under this inspection system, potential environmental health risks will be organized into a prioritizing scheme to inform maintenance and renovation work.

### *Questions and Answers*

Q: Are there any laws that review modulars?

A: Bellomo said he was not aware of any comprehensive study or state-level law that provides guidelines on modulars, but did reference an on-going study in California that is evaluating outdoor air quality around school facilities, including modulars. This study will help answer questions about the impacts of schools being sited near freeways, for example.

Q: What are the most crucial evaluation components to include when selecting a site for a new school?

A: There are many things to consider, but two of the most fundamental are proper evaluation of the prior land uses at the school site and rigorous soil and ground water tests. These reports should go through the proper review and approval process at the State before construction begins.

Q: Has the LAUSD focused work on educating teachers about potential environmental health and safety risks at school?

A: LA uses the EPA Tools for Schools program district-wide, as a means of helping to educate both maintenance staff and teachers. The kit includes a poster, for example, which outlines what a staff member should do if he/she notes signs of an environmental health risk in the school. Bellomo added that he believes there is room for much more education of school staff.

Bellomo reiterated the importance of using whatever tools are available to effect change. Where regulations with potential penalties exist, it is important to enforce them, he emphasized. Where they do not exist, it is useful and sometimes necessary to look to other means of motivating changes. Working at the local level (with local health officials) to declare unacceptably loud classroom conditions a public nuisance, for example, can achieve the ultimate goal of improving the quality of the children's learning environment in the absence of any specific code or rule regulating noise in classrooms – or in the absence of a sufficiently stringent rule.

## **Coordinated School Health Initiative Coordinated School Health Division**

Ginny Ehrlich, Presenter Romila Tandingan, Presenter  
Oregon Department of Education Oregon Division of Health

Ehrlich and Tandingan both expressed how pleased they were to be at the Roundtable and have the opportunity to learn more about the environmental health issues facing schools in Oregon. They were also pleased to have the opportunity to introduce Roundtable participants to Oregon's Coordinated School Health Initiative (CSHI) and begin discussion on how to incorporate environmental health and safety concerns into a broad blueprint for action on school health programs.

The fundamental goal of the CSHI is two-pronged: raise academic performance of Oregon students and improve children's health and well-being. The program recognizes the inherent link between a child's health and his/her capacity to achieve academically. Oregon is one many states that is receiving multi-year funding from CDC and the U.S. Department of Education to scope and implement a CSHI statewide. The CSHI will focus on eight components essential to students' health and well-being. One of these components, "Safe and Healthy School Environment" will address environmental health and safety concerns in and around school facilities. Other components include: health education, school health services, nutrition programs, mental health services, supportive and healthy policies, family and community involvement and physical education.

The CSHI began just nine months ago and is currently in the process of conducting a statewide needs assessment related to the current status of coordinated school health in Oregon. As the program progresses, constituent groups in each of the eight component areas will be convened to inform a statewide blueprint for action. Concurrently, the Initiative will conduct an education and awareness campaign about the links between student performance and student health behaviors. The CSHI will also support the development and implementation of a Coordinated School Health program in three pilot schools across the state.

Ehrlich and Tandingan also stressed how important it is to educate local decision-makers about the benefits of Coordinated School Health Programs.

### ***Questions and Answers***

Q: What resource people have you identified to help inform your work in each of the eight component areas you mention?

A: Ehrlich said that because the Initiative began so recently, they are still in the process of identifying and convening groups of experts and policy advisors for each of the areas. She noted that the Roundtable participants represent a very broad range of expertise in the area of "Healthy School Environments" and voiced her hope that participants become involved in the development of the CSHI blueprint, indicating there will be opportunities

to participate formally in this process in the near future. It was also noted that although the Roundtable represents a "good start," there are still important constituent groups missing from the table -- notably physicians and representatives from districts outside the Willamette Valley.

Q: Can you say a little more about the process that will be used to develop the blueprint under each component?

A: Under each component, the resource group will be developing goals, problem indicators, and ultimately five bold action steps needed at both the State and local level to – in the case of Healthy School Environments – improve the environmental health in schools across the state.

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After the morning presentations, the floor was opened for a brief discussion on all the issues that had been raised. Several Roundtable participants underscored the need for clear and consistent health and safety guidelines and/or standards that could be used to guide inspections. Additionally, the group acknowledged a need for more stringent regulations and tough penalties for those who do not adhere to standards, such as not letting contractors work in the district again if they do not meet regulations as in the LAUSD.

There was a general discussion about a lack of leadership and the frustration and inaction this can lead to. Parents and teachers are unsure of who to bring concerns to at the district or state level. When teachers or parents do raise concerns, they may be retaliated against by district officials and may be treated as "part of the problem." Because no one agency is clearly accountable for environmental health and safety in schools, the concerned parent and/or teacher does not have a clear path of recourse if his/her concerns are not taken seriously at the district level.

A general discussion about lack of funding for environmental health and safety noted the competing priorities that schools and school boards are faced with. Portland Public Schools, for example, currently has a smaller budget (in real dollars) for environmental health and safety than it did ten years ago, despite consistently growing student populations. This may in part be due to increasing pressure from the public to focus school resources on investments with clear returns in academic achievement. It may also stem partially from the disconnect between parents' perception of school facilities and the actual state of those facilities. It was noted that with no new influx of funding, there is no easy fix. Increasing environmental health budgets means cutting budgets elsewhere.

The group also discussed the implications of having no regular inspection and maintenance plans. In the absence of articulated health and safety plans, when an issue grabs public attention, funds may be funneled toward that issue in an emergency-response mode, when that issue may or may not pose the greatest health risk – may or may not be the most urgent and important environmental health issue for a school or district.

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## **Small Group Discussions – Morning session**

Participants broke up into five small groups of about eight each. They were asked to discuss three questions:

- What are the current challenges for Oregon?
- What initiatives are currently being undertaken to address these challenges?
- Where are the gaps that still need to be addressed?

### ***Highlights from these small group discussions:***

#### **Current Challenges**

Understaffed maintenance departments – diminishing resources

Lack of teeth in existing guidelines

Gaining consensus on priorities

Need for routine health and safety inspections -- no definition of "best practices"

Lack of healthy schools guidelines for new construction and/or renovation

Lack of knowledge and training for educators, health professionals, environmental professionals, and parents

Difficulty in tracking an educational or health outcome back to an environmental cause

So many other issues competing for schools' attention and resources

Lack of accountability and leadership -- no clear understanding of who is responsible for what

Lack of awareness of environmental health issues at different levels: research, institutional, clinical

Deferred maintenance

Medical assessment

Identifying alternatives to toxic chemicals

Varying success and speed of feedback loops to communicate risks and motivate changes

General mistrust of officials

Corporate interests influencing the agenda – by funding curricula, etc.

Moving from process to action – from the community level out

Categorical funding streams lack flexibility

Age of buildings

Disconnect between public's perception of school environment and its actual state

Health professionals/doctors are not at the table

Hesitance to adopt a precautionary mindset

#### **Current Initiatives**

Coordinated Schools Health Initiative

Local level partnerships between parents, schools, public health departments, etc.

Issue-driven campaigns at school and district level (Salem, Portland, Eugene)

Portland School District pesticide policy

House Bill 3202

Radon testing

Activists against expansion of I-5

Master Home Environmentalist program (homes only)

GIS mapping of pollutant sources  
SMILE (acronym for: ?) OSU's  
School-to-Work  
Earth Force  
Oregon State University Extension  
EPA Tools for Schools – grants and train the trainer  
Oregon Asthma Network – bringing diverse groups together  
Senator Gordly bill to collect health and environmental data  
LEED – (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)  
Healthy Environment Forums (Oregon Environmental Council)  
New law reporting use of pesticides  
EPA support on eliminating lead, asbestos, and PCBs  
School pesticides posting and notification bill – next legislative session  
State DOE must develop procedures to get Mercury out of schools  
Oregon Green Schools initiative  
High Performance Schools  
Portland Public Schools Sustainability Resolution

### **Remaining Gaps**

“Green” purchasing policies  
Advocates in place at influential levels  
Clearly defined and communicated policies at the district level  
Guidelines for prioritizing environmental health risks  
Community awareness  
Demonstrated connection between environmental conditions and health/learning  
More enforcement of current regulations  
Lack of regulations  
Baseline data on current state of school environments in Oregon  
Lack of funding  
Incentives to invest in improvements and to minimize risks  
Technical training for maintenance staffs, facilities managers, school nurses, educators. . .  
Basic epidemiological data on environmental health problems  
Environmental health standards designed to protect the most vulnerable  
Standards:

- numerical health standards
- building design standards
- performance standards
- "best management practices"
- technical guidance
- LEED

Spraying notification including exact dates and flagging off affected areas  
Identifying cost-effective substitutes for toxic chemicals  
Product testing (long term)  
Coordination and leadership – matrix defining roles and responsibilities  
Appropriate and meaningful risk/status communication – and a model for such communication

Bottom-up, inclusive planning  
Public policy structure at district and state levels  
Inventories of hazardous materials in schools  
Mechanism for schools to evaluate environmental health risk  
Training / information for schools on "best practices", maintenance, standards, etc.  
Environmental Health Directory and/or other networking tools  
Evaluation, cost/benefit of existing initiative  
District specialists on facility assessment

### **Small Group Discussions – Afternoon session**

In the afternoon, different small groups were convened to begin brainstorming what to do – how best to get the most out of existing efforts while at the same time work toward overcoming current challenges and filling in remaining gaps. Groups were tasked with answering two basic questions:

- What are the top three priorities for the next three to five years?
- What are the next steps that need to be taken to address these priorities
- and who should take those steps?

### ***Highlights from the small group discussions on priorities and next steps:***

1) Priority: Increase awareness (via education) of environmental health issues in schools at many levels

Next Steps: -Institute a physical environment survey on students' report cards.

- Establish School Site Councils at every school
- Kindergarten Roundup
- Public service announcements, possibly funded by the U.S. EPA or other agency
- Disseminate information through Parent Teacher Associations
- Create a coalition/steering committee – begin with Roundtable participants
- Find ways to include environmental health issues in school curricula
- Institute training programs for school nurses & physicians on risks of chemical use
- Review literature to document connections between environmental conditions and health
- Translate scientific information into accessible, common language messages
- Involve students in school assessment process

2) Priority: Obtain baseline school environmental health data to identify threats and scope of the problem and maintain an inventory of data on each school.

Next Steps: -Establish a routine inspection requirement for all schools across the state with clear guidelines

- Seek and obtain federal grant funding (U.S. EPA? CDC?) to fund baseline study
- Identify sample schools
- Include school population surveys to discern between school and home exposures
- Pursue funding with DEQ Technical Assistance Program
- Amplify PR with partnering non-governmental organizations
- Use technology to create a student-driven registry on toxics use in schools



- Expand Oregon State University's SMILE program
- Obtain University of Washington's data on children's health (in schools?)
- Create tracking and monitoring of health of student and staff as a function of environmental conditions at the school

3) Priority: Identify Oregon state agency ultimately responsible for school environmental health issues and formalize interagency coordination on school environmental health issues among

Oregon Department of Education, Department of Environmental Quality, Oregon Health Department, Oregon State Health Association, Building Inspectors, etc. – to conduct research and set and enforce standards.

Next steps: -Have NGOs working in this area put pressure on state agencies to do this or find someone in these agencies who understands the issues and has enough clout to make this happen.

4) Priority: Create a coalition/steering committee to take the lead. Such a committee should include representation from environmental non-profits, health educators, teachers, primary care providers, parents, students, policy makers, scientists, health trainers, public health professionals, faith leaders, environmental justice community organizations, facilities professionals, school boards and administrators, and architects – among others.

Next Steps: -Apply Community Solutions Team model – tiered coalition with local level representatives and steering committee that communicates with Governor's office and state agencies

- Apply Healthy Schools Network structure as a model ([www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org))
- Establish listserv and/or other means of acquiring and sharing information
- Use CSHI as an incubator for a coalition in OR
- Develop media connections
- Focus on specific issues, later expand environmental health focus
- Connect with existing organizations to get seed funding
- Invite someone from Governor's office to sit on Coalition – to gain support

5) Priority: Increase funding for environmental health protection in schools (i.e., for toxics abatement).

Next Steps:

- Find a media hook – i.e.: have students lobby and talk to the media or organize a youth summit
- Ensure accountability of elected officials – get them to the table; make it a voter issue
- Bring in new allies, like faith communities
- Establish a pilot project to define the scope of the problem, including health assessments
- Investigate potential of redirecting lottery money
- Institute new fees on chemical use
- Pursue public and private grant funding
- Use existing funds more efficiently or redirect existing funds from other programs

6) Priority: Create a school-based guide on environmental health and safety.

Next Steps:

- Create state-wide coalition/task force to work on this

7) Priority: Minimize use of pesticides in schools

Next Steps:

- Document health impact from pesticide exposures
- Develop an Oregon-specific package of educational materials
- Work at local and national levels to promote IPM policies in districts
- Offer incentives at the school and/or district level for minimizing pesticide use and offer alternatives

8) Priority: Create a Governor-appointed, State-level Task Force to address issues of accountability, technical assistance to schools, and regulations.

Next Steps:

- Do sample survey data collection first
- Develop non-governmental organization (NGO) coalition to press on state officials and agencies
- Organize a public relations event for political candidates, assessing their opinions on environmental health issues in schools

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## **Closing Discussion**

After highlighting the priorities and action steps, the entire group briefly discussed how this group might proceed after the Roundtable meeting. Ideas that were emphasized:

- Find an appropriate non-governmental organization (NGO) in Oregon to take the lead on this
- Create strong partnerships between government and NGO
- Engage PGE's Green Building Services
- Find ways to get press interested in this subject
- Distribute L.A. guidelines on school health and safety when they are published.
- Establish a listserve and perhaps some centralized source of information (web site) on these concerns
- Involve kids in this process--they think of ways outside the box.
- Advise the EPA on what the schools and the public want to see done about these problems.

The Institute for Children's Environmental Health and the EPA Region 10 agreed to get the notes out to the group within 2-3 weeks and to convene a follow-up conference call later in July. The Coordinated School Health Initiative agreed to organize a follow-up meeting with those concerned with environmental health issues in schools, including all those invited to this Roundtable.

## **Other constituencies who should be included**

Confederation of School Administrators Major Health Plans  
Ozzie Rose, Executive Director Care Oregon, Blue Cross, Kaiser, Providence

Oregon Education Association Staff Unions for Classified School Staff  
Teresa Carter OSEU, AFT, AFSCME  
Oregon Assoc. of Classified Employees

Pediatricians Oregon PTA  
Emanuel Hospital Debbie Rocco

More Medical Staff Principal, Educator Representatives  
Oregon Primary Care Assoc.

Oregon School Nurses Association OAHPERD/OAAHE  
Oregon Nurses Association  
Eastern OR Public Health Nurses Assoc. Area Health Education Center

Oregon Medical Association

OHSU - Rural Health Outreach Project OSAA (School Activities Associate/Athletic)

Luci Longoria OSU-Extension Service  
Tobacco Policy Coordinator  
Oregon Health Division More variation of Geographic  
Representation overall

Env. Health Staff in County Health Depts. SOAR (Science Outreach & Resources)

Ctr. for Research and Occupational Health Oregon Poison Control  
OHSU Tonya Drayden

Natl. Pesticide Telecommunication Network Environmental Consulting Firms  
SECOR

Bill Lamenon- OHSU Oregon Green Schools Assoc.  
Freda Sherburne or Kristan Mitchell

Oregon School Health Education Coalition School-Based Health Center Network  
Katie Zeal at 503-731-4331

Oregon Environmental Health Assoc. Conference of Local Enviro. Health Superv.  
Dave Bussen (Douglas County Public Health) Bob Wilson (Benton County Public  
Health)

Association for Faith-Based Communities The Urban League (Self Enhancement Inc.)  
(Portland) Tony Hopson

Craig Warden, MD Dr. John Green III  
OHSU- Pediatrics Aurora Health Clinic  
Head OR Poison Control Center 503-266-7933  
(Treats people with chemical injuries, also  
children with autism)

## **Existing Resources**

Oregon Center for Environmental Health: [www.oregon-health.org](http://www.oregon-health.org)

Oregon Asthma Program: [www.oshd.org/asthma](http://www.oshd.org/asthma)

LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design): [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)

Healthy Schools Network, Inc.: [www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org)

Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP):  
[www.pesticide.org/schoolsol.html](http://www.pesticide.org/schoolsol.html)  
Fact sheets on pesticide and alternatives. Also the schools page/resources on web.  
P.O. Box 1393, Eugene OR 97440

Kids Count - a think tank report which surveys children's issues nationwide and state by  
state, funded  
by Annie E. Casey Foundation. Local coordinator is Rick Brandon at University of  
Washington, Dan  
Evans School of Public Policy, Seattle. [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org)

Chemical Injury Information Network: [www.ciin.org](http://www.ciin.org)

Children's Environmental Health Network: [www.cehn.org](http://www.cehn.org)  
Look at their Resource Guide for state organizations involved with Environmental Health  
& Kids

Institute for Children's Environmental Health: [www.iceh.org](http://www.iceh.org)

Healthy Schools Handbook - published by National Education Association (NEA)

City of Portland Office of Sustainable Development: 503-823-7222

PGE - Green Building Services: 503-603-1679 or tollfree 866-743-4277,  
[www.portlandgeneral.com](http://www.portlandgeneral.com)