

National Media: Embargoed for 12:01 PM EDT, 9:01 AM PDT, Monday, April 24, 2006

**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION ON MENTAL RETARDATION
AMERICAN SCHOOL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
HEALTHY SCHOOLS CAUCUS of the
National Education Association
HEALTHY SCHOOLS NETWORK
WITH
20 ORGANIZATIONS NATIONWIDE**

Embargoed for Release: 12 noon EDT, 9 AM PDT, Monday, April 24, 2006

Contact: Claire Barnett, w 202-543-7555, cell 518-573-5878

32 Million Children at High Risk: State by State Data

Personal Stories Reveal Problems Are Deep, Widespread

Coalition Calls for Congressional Hearing and Federal Actions

(Washington, DC, April 24, 2006) Releasing two linked national reports, national, state, and local groups—and the countless children, parents, educators, and health care providers they represent-- called for a Congressional Hearing and new federal health policy to address deficiencies in children’s environmental health protection, as well as stronger efforts to improve school environments in all states. “There are an estimated 32,000,000 children at high risk every day for health and learning problems caused by schools and children have no health protection”, said **Claire L. Barnett, Executive Director, Healthy Schools Network**. “We love our schools, but this must change.” She added, “Federal health policy is crucial, as is leadership for an interagency strategy to hasten the deployment of best practices to improve the environmental conditions of schools.”

Added **American Association on Mental Retardation’s Executive Director Doreen Croser**, "It is often the case that children with developmental disabilities are often at special risk from adverse environmental conditions due to pre-existing health impairments." Said **Carolyn Smith-Evans, Chair, National Education Association’s Healthy Schools Caucus**, “Teachers and other school personnel are at daily risk in sick buildings, with inadequate environmental and occupational health protections. Our own children and our own students have none at all. How can this continue?” Commented **Susan Wooley, Executive Director, American School Health Association**, "Our

National Media: Embargoed for 12:01 PM EDT, 9:01 AM PDT, Monday, April 24, 2006

mission is to support school-based programs that protect and promote the health of children and youth. When almost one of every two public school buildings in the U.S. contains an environmental hazard, both school children and school staff suffer. Clearly, rectifying these unhealthy conditions that interfere with teachers' abilities to teach and children's abilities to achieve should be a high priority for anyone who wants healthy, successful young people.”

LESSONS LEARNED is the first-ever compendium of state by state data and personal accounts of avoidable illnesses, disabilities, and threats to children’s educational rights. While some health departments are taking steps, the report recounts the pain and needless suffering of children, families, and employees, described in more than forty first-person accounts. For example, facing a lifetime of poor health ahead, an injured student in WA finally took his own life. Parent Kim Voss of Oklahoma said, “I am horrified. Our daughter has always been medically fragile and does not speak for herself. Yet no one told me that her worsening health was due to the renovation dust in her wing.” Moreover, good teachers have been forced to leave their posts; buildings have been closed at enormous costs to communities; parents have even been banned from further investigations of onsite hazards; parents of chronically ill children, denied accommodations, report that schools have threatened them with abuse/neglect reporting or have withheld educational services. A copy of the report is posted to www.healthyschools.org

Lloyd Kolbe, PhD, founding and former Director of CDC’s Division of Adolescent and School Health said, “Unhealthy school environments represent the greatest unaddressed health crisis suffered not only by our children, but by school administrators, personnel, and others who have dedicated their lives to educate and care for our children in shared and often deteriorated spaces.”

WHO’S IN CHARGE of PROTECTING CHILDREN’S HEALTH AT SCHOOL?, the second report, provides the underlying research base, detailing the science of indoor environments, the current activities of the federal agencies, and the surprising lack of knowledge, authority, and effective programs to respond to children and their parents. Report consultant **Jerome Paulson, MD, Co-Director, Mid-Atlantic Center for Children's Health and Environment**, a federally-funded environmental health unit affiliated with the Department of Environment and Occupational Health at George Washington University and a former special assistant to the Director of CDC's National Center on Environmental Health, said, “People really need to understand that there just isn’t anything out there for millions and millions of children. Nothing. If our national goal is to have

National Media: Embargoed for 12:01 PM EDT, 9:01 AM PDT, Monday, April 24, 2006

healthy adults, we have to start by ensuring we have healthy children—and we don't. This is a call to action not just for federal and state officials, but **also** for the philanthropic sector which needs to provide leadership and seed monies so that governmental agencies will have a foundation from which to work." A copy of the report is posted to www.healthyschools.org

States Ranked by School Risks to Children's Health and Learning

Numbers of children at high risk and state rankings by percent of schools in the state that have adverse facility conditions must be carefully considered. The federal Department of Education routinely collects information from the states on the number of school facilities, students, students in special education, and personnel. The percent of school facilities that are inadequate and the percent that have unsatisfactory environmental conditions are taken from 1999 and 1996 data as reported in the American Society of Civil Engineers *Infrastructure Report Card 2005*-- remarkably, the only such national data available. Inadequate building features include roofing, framing, plumbing, life safety, and more. Environmental conditions include ventilation, lighting, heating, indoor air, acoustics and physical security. Problems such as poor indoor air, inadequate heat, light, plumbing, and ventilation, or poor acoustical controls can impact both health and learning. Using this data and the experiences of its regional staff, the US Environmental Protection Agency estimates that half of all schools have indoor air pollution, a top human health hazard. Indoor air can be five to 100 times more polluted than outdoor air.

To estimate a number of children at high risk of health and learning impairments, Healthy Schools Network (HSN) multiplied the average percent of schools in each state reporting inadequate building features and environmental problems times the total enrollment.

32M: Over Count or Under Count?

Self reports of facility problems by schools have limitations. In a state providing aid for local construction (see state data tables), it could be in the interests of districts to show need. It might not be in the interests of districts to report problems absent a source of capital funds. But more importantly, the studies on America's school facilities have not asked about mold or pest infestations, lead in drinking water, nearby hazardous facilities, failed kitchen inspections, pesticide use, the presence of indoor shooting ranges, or if the schools have chemical management plans. US EPA pilot studies in Maine and Minnesota showed that schools contained an average of four to seven pounds of elemental mercury. CDC recently reported elevated blood lead levels in teenagers

National Media: Embargoed for 12:01 PM EDT, 9:01 AM PDT, Monday, April 24, 2006

on school rifle teams. **Thus, the estimated 32,000,000 children at high risk of health and learning impairments may be an under count, not an over count, especially considering children have no environmental health services.**

Ten worst states (average: % of schools with environmental problems plus % with facility inadequacies): District of Columbia 82%; Ohio, 79.5%; California 79%; Massachusetts 77.5%; Alaska 74.5%; West Virginia 74.5%; Oregon 73.5%; New Mexico 72%; New York 71.5%; Florida 68.5%; New Hampshire 68.5%. **Ten best:** Georgia 42.5%; South Dakota 47.5%; Pennsylvania 49.5%; Nevada 49.5%; Mississippi 52%; Arkansas 52%; Nebraska 52.5%; Texas 53%; Wisconsin 54.5%; Vermont 55.5%; North Dakota 55.5%. All other states had averages between 56% and 68%.

Also participating in the national release and supporting the urgent need for a Congressional Hearing and new federal actions are the following organizations and leaders who are working on these complex issues in their states or regions.

Alaska

Ruth Etzel, MD, Academy of Pediatrics, Alaska Chapter, former Chair, AAP's Committee on Environmental Health. "Physicians need to become aware of and active in assessing the links between children's health and the environment. It simply doesn't cross the mind of many health care providers to ask about exposures at school or in child care settings. Getting a good history of these exposures is every bit as important as getting a good occupational history in an adult patient."

California

Global Green, Hillary Gross. "Global Green USA is working to ensure Los Angeles' kids are taught in buildings that are better places to learn, healthier places to work, and cost less to operate. We are proud to work with the Healthy Schools Network and its many partners to ensure the places kids spend the vast majority of their day, a school, are built and maintained properly."

Connecticut

ConnFESS (Connecticut Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools), Diane Ethier, Board Member, "ConnFESS has just released an updated Advocacy Checklist that offers steps for assessing how well schools are complying with Connecticut laws dealing with environmental health issues. We are also applauding the efforts of the state's School Indoor Environmental Response Team, coordinated by the CT Department of Health, for its *IAQ Tools for Schools* training program that has resulted in measurable improvements in indoor environmental quality as well as in human health."

District of Columbia

DC Smart Schools, Jeff Wilkes. "The District's new Master Facility Plan should incorporate reform language to ensure that every DCPS child has a healthy and high performance school and that schools are centers of community renewal and activity. Why put so much money into a result that is not sensitive to children's learning and developmental needs?"

Florida

Healthy Living Foundation, Denise Robinette, President. "Our children's health should be our top priority - over the standard testing we seem to focus on. We need action and change. Too many parents struggle daily with the costs of sick children unable to learn. Pro-active choices like the use of green and non-toxic cleaning and painting products as well as integrated pest management should be our "new" standard for regular building maintenance, as well as repairing hurricane-damaged buildings. Providing a healthy learning environment will result in increases in learning."

Georgia

Glynn Environmental Coalition, Dan Parshley. "The cost of de-contaminating a schoolyard is high; but higher still is the future cost of education and health care for children attending schools next to toxic sites and industries and impacted by pollutants. Our efforts to stop unhealthy toxic air releases next to our schools have been fought by the EPA and the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. EPA recently eliminated the law we sought legal relief from toxic air releases in an attempt to moot our case."

Illinois

Healthy Schools Campaign, Rochelle Davis, Executive Director. "As the reports show, bringing people together is often the best first step in this complex, long-overlooked arena. We need to build consensus to prioritize health and safety improvements, implement green cleaning programs, and increase awareness of the importance of environmental health in schools."

Indiana

Improving Kids Environments Coalition, Janet McCabe, Executive Director. "Our children spend a huge amount of time in their school buildings, where we want them to be safe, healthy and able to learn. When schools have problems with mold, chemical or pesticide use, or other environmental contaminants, we are failing them. We need to learn from our mistakes and past experiences and work together to make sure all Indiana's schools are safe for all Indiana children, as well as the adults that teach them."

Maine

American Lung Association of Maine, Virginia Mott, Schools Consultant. "Schools don't need to struggle alone with environmental problems. Help is available from a wide array of sources. We must all work together to protect the health of students and staff by ensuring a safe and healthy school environment."

Maryland

PTA Council of Howard County, Veronika Carella. "The gap in existing law that allows for hazardous chemicals to be used while children are legally obligated to be in school must be closed. We urgently need preventative measures that will protect all children, especially health-affected children, from preventable exposures that lead to injury and absences. Children should not have to pay for their education with their health."

Massachusetts

Massachusetts Healthy Schools Network at Mass COSH (MA Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health), Tolle Graham, Coordinator. "As a parent and health and safety specialist, I help parents and school employees address environmental problems daily. Health Department leadership is critical, as is the rapid implementation of Green Cleaning that will remove thousands of gallons of toxic products from schools. We are calling on the state to pass the Safer Cleaning Products Bill that will require all schools, daycares and

public buildings to use green cleaners as defined by a State program and to train those working with the safer products.”

Massachusetts PTA, Ellie Goldberg, Legislative Chair. “For over a century, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has advocated for the health and education of children. The Massachusetts PTA supports initiatives to enhance parent leadership and involvement, to create local and state partnerships that improve accountability, and to promote quality management systems for building and operating schools. Currently we are supporting state legislation that creates higher health and safety requirements for buildings and safer cleaning products, especially to protect students with asthma.”

New Hampshire

The Jordan Institute/NH Partnership for High Performance Schools, Kirk Stone. “Our NH Partnership is seeing school districts all across the State taking a new and careful look at ways to improve their buildings AND the health and productivity of the occupants. High performance design must include detailed consideration of health consequences, especially in the way the building will be operated and maintained. Next month we are conducting a series of “Cleaning for Health” seminars around NH to help schools and communities switch to less toxic and more cost-effective cleaning products.”

New York State and City

Healthy Schools Network-New York Program, Director, Stephen Boese. “We are at a critical time for children’s environmental health, yet the Governor vetoed a small but significant budget item to pilot the extension of pediatric environmental health services. Despite progress on many fronts, we still have no system to protect children from toxic exposures. Too many New York State children are attending schools that make them sick, and there is no system of accountability.”

Philip Landrigan, MD M.Sc, the noted pediatrician and Ethel H. Wise Professor and Chair of the Department of Community and Preventive Medicine of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City added, “Children are increasingly vulnerable to serious harm resulting from exposures to environmental hazards. The research report “*Who’s in Charge*” demonstrates the need for an organized and expanded pediatric environmental health system....”

Vermont

Cleaning for Health/INFORM, Carol Westinghouse. “We are committed to getting "green" cleaning into all schools as a fast and effective way to improve indoor air quality, school cleanliness and children’s health: it’s a win-win situation that could be implemented immediately in all Vermont schools with legislative support. Contact your VT representative and request the “Envision” program be made mandatory.”

Washington

Coalition for Environmentally Safe Schools, Maria Mason. “The games must stop: children at risk or health-affected need regulatory interventions, not fuzzy guidelines that are three decades old. Isn’t a core function of public health to protect our future citizens? If our agencies commit to an effective plan, we would be willing to help find the resources for implementation.”

Washington Education Association, Art Busch, UniServ Representative. “The educational employees of this state voted in March 2006 to make employee and student health a priority and are putting hard money into the effort. They recognize that bad environmental quality leaves all

children behind. We must educate about good health, agitate for stricter laws and organize to demand a healthy school environment. A safe environment is a human right.”

Washington Education Association- Indoor Environmental Quality Task Force, Chip Halverson, Chair. “The Washington State Board of Health has an opportunity to create School Environmental Rules that can dramatically improve the health of our children and school employees, or it can choose to continue the with status quo guidelines created in 1971 that are vague, hazardous to occupant health, and draining millions of dollars from our school budgets.”

West Virginia

Coal River Mountain Watch, Bo Webb. “The Governor of West Virginia, state agencies, and the state school board continue to ignore the health problems of children who live in the coalfields. No better example of lax regulatory enforcement exists than Marsh Fork Elementary School. MFE is surrounded by a massive coal mining operation that includes a coal load-out silo 200 feet from the school and a seeping sludge dam containing 2.8 billion gallons of toxic coal waste looming over the school. Our children are sick, yet we cannot get the Governor nor his agencies to conduct air and soil test at this school. Our children have become victims....”