

School Health Watch

The Newsletter of the Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign

Healthy
Schools
Campaign



Making Illinois Schools Environmentally Healthy Places to Learn & Work

Winter 2004

www.healthyschoolscampaign.org

Mold and Air Quality in Schools

Prevention is the Name of the Game For Indoor Air Quality

From Plainfield to Peoria and Chicago to Champaign, many schools in recent years have been confronted with mold problems—or at least problems perceived to be mold-related

Some experts are calling mold “the new asbestos.” There are similarities: Both can ravage the vulnerable health of children and of staff members as well. On the other hand, others point out that mold is everywhere and is harmful only in very rare cases—and even then mostly to those with asthma or allergies.

No firm count of how many schools seriously affected by mold is available, but the number of closures and cleanups seems to have increased in 2003. Maybe it's the new asbestos and maybe it isn't; but it certainly is a problem for school indoor air quality (IAQ). The good news is that schools can cost-effectively reduce the potential for IAQ problems. Some basic management techniques, a better understanding of the issues and improved communications can head off many of these problems before they occur, and can save schools money.

A Growing Issue

From 1999 through 2002, mold-related lawsuits increased 300 percent nationwide, and there are more than 22,000 pending lawsuits in 2003 alone.

Fines or awards from litigation aren't the only potential source of costs to schools, though. Mold remediation in difficult situations can reach into the millions of dollars. For example, between 1992 and 2002, St. Charles High School spent more than \$29 million trying to fix a mold problem. Other recent media reports from other states include:

- Austin, Texas – Voters approved a \$49.3 million bond issue to pay for mold removal and preventive maintenance in 91 different school buildings.
- Myers, Fla. – Teachers filed a lawsuit against county school officials, accusing them of failing to fix known mold problems.
- Bristol, Tenn. – 1,000 students spent a month at Bristol Motor Speedway attending class in the skyboxes while mold was removed at Sullivan East High School. The repairs cost \$600,000.

Air Awareness

It's not possible to eliminate mold from a building. Thousands of types of molds exist, and depending on the season and the weather, mold counts in the outdoor environment can vary

greatly. What a school can do is better understand the factors contributing to indoor mold infestations.

In short, mold needs three things to take hold: comfortable temperature, food and water.

Controlling temperature is a challenge, because the temperature needs of students and teachers are the very same temperatures in which molds flourish. As for food, in the eyes of mold, almost all organic matter is food—including dust, wood, drywall—so it's impossible to completely eliminate nourishment sources from a classroom.



However, we can have a significant impact on reducing moisture. Reducing the water available to mold can include quickly repairing leaky pipes, having adequate ventilation to reduce moisture in the air, and addressing problems with water condensation on exterior walls.

No Problems; Only Solutions

Four main keys exist to keeping mold/IAQ complaints from exploding into major problems:

- 1) Have an IAQ plan in place
- 2) Ensure a quick response
- 3) Investigate the situation appropriately
- 4) Communicate to everyone what you are doing

Have a Plan - Luckily for schools, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency offers an excellent tool for planning. EPA's “IAQ Tools for Schools” at www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/ is also completely free. The kit provides the guidelines necessary for schools to create customized IAQ management plans.

Respond Quickly - Preparing contact lists and knowing direct lines of responsibility in emergencies helps in addressing problems. In the case of water intrusion, a 48-hour window exists in which one needs to dry, clean and ventilate to minimize the mold growth. Also,

Continued on Page 2



Fact File Putting a Lid on Mold

If you see mold, find the source of water intrusion, leakage or water vapor accumulation and correct it. If the moisture source is not eliminated, the mold will grow back.

When a school gets wet, dry building materials and furnishings as rapidly as possible (within 48 hours to prevent the initiation of mold growth) by:

- bringing in portable fans to increase air circulation and speed the drying process;
- pulling up edges of wall-to-wall carpet to allow increased air circulation (if carpet is very dirty, old, damaged or cannot be dried within 48 hours, consider discarding it);
- running fans continuously until materials are dry, and;
- removing baseboards and drilling holes through the bottom of the drywall to improve wall cavity drying (if the room has flooded to a depth of greater than one inch).

Source: *National Clearing House for Educational Facilities* - www.edfacilities.org/pubs/mold.html

Campaign Launches Green Clean Pilot Projects with Chicago Public Schools

On Oct. 9, the Healthy Schools Campaign and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) held a kick-off meeting for their Green Clean pilot projects at Whitney Young Magnet High School. The pilot projects will test environmentally preferable cleaning products and equipment.

Through the use of these products and appropriate staff training, "green cleaning" aims to create healthier school environments for children and reduce janitors', teachers' and visitors' exposure to toxins.

Pilot projects are occurring in 10 schools: Addams, Carson, Crane, Cuffe, Earhart, Kennedy/Kinzie, Mason, Peck, Peterson and Simeon. These projects are part of a broader process to explore green cleaning. In March, CPS convened a taskforce to oversee this process which, in turn, adopted four nationally recognized standards to guide product selection and cleaning protocols. The results of the pilot projects, which lasted until January 2004, will be provided to the taskforce and will inform their recommendations to the CPS Board of Education.

The October event was well-attended, with people representing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Department of Public Health, CPS administrators, area instructional officers, engineers, union representatives, teachers, and vendors of green cleaning products and equipment.

Sean Murphy, chief operating officer of the CPS Department of Operations, welcomed the crowd and expressed enthusiasm for the district's move toward green cleaning. Other speakers included Bill Iacullo of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 143, Laura Garza of SEIU Local 1, Stephen Ashkin of The Ashkin Group, and finally Mark Hands, manager of contract administration, and Darrell Phillips, grounds and custodial inspector—both of CPS.



Rochelle Davis, Executive Director of the Healthy Schools Campaign, and Sean Murphy, chief operating officer of the CPS Department of Operations.



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Mold & IAQ in Schools (continued from Page 1)

quick response shows students, teachers and parents that the school is on top of things, and will reduce risks of bad publicity.

Investigate - IAQ plans should outline how to run an investigation. Done preventively with existing staff, investigations can reduce the need for outside help from consultants and keep costs to a minimum. Also, understanding when to do or not to do air sampling is an important part of your investigation. Often, air sampling is expensive, but the data it provides can lead to more confusion than actionable information.

Communicate - Many instances exist in which small problems were blown out of proportion because it seems a school was being secretive. The IAQ Tools For Schools kit was recently updated with a new guide on how to develop communications plans. By effectively communicating with your community, many minor issues can be put to rest before they get parents, teachers, and students upset.

The Healthy Schools Campaign is working hard to cooperate with schools and state agencies and develop ways to help schools deal preventively with mold and other indoor air issues. In 2004, we will work to provide the healthiest learning and working environments possible by promoting our Healthy Schools Best Practices Act and supporting proper funding for schools.



Getting Nutrition on the Menu

With childhood and adolescent obesity on the rise—along with the health risks of obesity—many government and public health officials are concerned about the food that children get at schools. Although the U.S. Department of Agriculture has guidelines for federally funded school food programs, other foods and drinks sold in cafeterias, vending machines and school stores don't have to meet those standards.



Recognizing the problem of obesity and the need for schools to promote healthy eating, school districts nationwide are beginning to say “no” to high-fat, high-sugar and high-salt foods on campus.

Illinois is no exception to this growing trend. Mundelein High School District 120, for example, has prohibited the sale of

soda, as well as salt- and sugar-laden snacks, on campus. Twin Groves Middle School in Buffalo Grove is the only District 96 school with vending machines, one for bottled water and one for a sports drink. Also, at the three schools in Lincolnshire-Prairie View Elementary District 103, fatty favorites such as hamburgers and burritos are being replaced by more nutritious entrees, such as pastas.



The Healthy Schools Campaign is available to work with school districts, parents or others who want to improve the school food environment. For more information, you can e-mail Rochelle Davis at rochelle@healthyschoolscampaign.org or call her at (312) 419-1810.

According to a December 2001 report by the U.S. Surgeon General, the number of overweight adolescents has tripled since 1980, with 13 percent of children and adolescents now overweight.

Overweight children and adolescents are more likely to become overweight or obese adults

Obesity is associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, asthma, heart disease, stroke, hypertension, breathing problems, high blood cholesterol, and other life-threatening conditions.



Laughing Matters: Supporting Healthy Schools

Thursday, March 4, 2004

The Second City e.t.c. Theater

230 W. North Ave., Chicago
(Under the Piper's Alley marquee)

Benefit Chairs

Lisa Madigan, Illinois Attorney General
Susan Scrimshaw, Ph.D., Dean, UIC School of Public Health

6 p.m. — Buffet Dinner & Cocktails
Dinner created by Illinois Institute of Arts - Culinary Arts

7:30 p.m. — Second City e.t.c. Performance
By Chicago's premier comedy club

To purchase tickets or learn more about sponsorships, visit www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/laughing-matters.htm or contact Mike Reeb (mike@healthyschoolscampaign.org or 312-419-1810)

Ticket Prices

(Dinner and Show)
\$60

Sponsorship Levels

Producer — **\$2,500**
(10 tickets)

Director — **\$1,000**
(4 tickets)

Stage Manager — **\$500**
(2 tickets)

Choreographer — **\$250**
(2 tickets)

Contributions to Laughing Matters will support the Healthy Schools Campaign are tax-deductible to the extent allowable under the law.

Healthy Schools Campaign Profile / Spotlight



Students Take Action Through Green Flag Program

The Green Flag Program, which encourages environmental leadership in schools, is designed to help communities make their schools healthier places to learn and to educate students about environmental issues. A new project of the Child Proofing Our Communities Campaign and coordinated by the Center for Health, Environment, and Justice, the Green Flag Program helps schools become safe and healthy through investigation, education, innovation, and action.

In the program, students and adults work together to investigate environmental issues in their schools, identify problems, create solutions and improve their school environments. With each positive step a school community takes, the Green Flag Program presents awards to the school and students, culminating in the presentation of the Green Flag Award for Environmental Leadership. Schools can address four topic areas through the program and earn awards in any of them. They are: Integrated Pest Management, Indoor Air Quality, Non-Toxic Products, and Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

The goals of the program are: (1) Have students, parents, teachers, administrators, staff and other school personnel work together so that every school will have its own environmental club or "Green Flag team"; (2) have a tiered award system so that the program is accessible and provides incentives for additional and more significant goals; and (3) integrate environmental issues into the context of school programs and concerns.

The Healthy Schools Campaign, a member of the Green Flag planning committee, serves as the official mentor of any Illinois school that wishes to participate in the Green Flag Program. For schools that would like to improve their environmental health, but do not have student participation, the Healthy Schools Campaign also offers a school-based Environmental Audit Program.

For more information about the Green Flag Program, contact Outreach Director Louella Hung at (312) 419-1810 or louella@healthyschoolscampaign.org, or visit www.greenflagschools.org.

Program Goals

- Create "Green Flag teams" at schools with broad representation.
- Ensure access; create incentives.
- Integrate environmental issues in school programs.



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