

CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP OF NY

Healthy Schools Network
www.healthyschools.org
Stephen J. Boese, NYS Director
Co-Chair



Learning Disabilities Association of New York
www.ldanys.org
Heather Loukmas, Executive Director
Co-Chair

LDA

Learning Disabilities Association
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*A Partnership across
New York State to
improve children's
environmental health*

Children's Environmental Health Symposium

Children today are surrounded by an ever increasing number of chemicals with little or no toxicity information available. These chemicals often harm human health, especially the health of children whose bodies are still developing. To explore the social, political, and medical implications of environmental exposure to these toxic chemicals and substances and the subsequent impact on children's health, the Children's Environmental Health Partnership of New York recently hosted the second New York State Children's Environmental Health Symposium in Albany on March 17th.

The Symposium, co-sponsored by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Environmental Business Association of NY State as well as the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the NYS Department of Health brought together a diverse group of over 160 attendees including health practitioners, environment, health and children's advocates, business and NYS state agency representatives, the academic community, and others.

Judith Enck, the Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Richard Daines, NYS DOH Commissioner and Val Washington, Deputy Commissioner, NYS DEC, made opening remarks about the importance of

protecting children from various environmental exposures. All agreed that protecting children from environmental hazards is an important NYS priority, and that the state agencies and executive office are engaged in education, outreach, and new policies to protect children.

David O. Carpenter, M.D., Director of the Institute for Health and Environment, University of Albany, cited several studies during his presentation documenting the toxic effects of environmental hazards to children, including lead; PCBs; dioxins; and mercury. Dr. Carpenter talked about the devastating affects of lead poisoning in children that include decreased IQ, hyperactivity, aggression, and various learning disabilities.

Dr. Carpenter also highlighted the impact of exposure to other environmental contaminants such as PCBs and dioxins.

Passed on from mother to infant, and during the developing years of children, PCBs and dioxins impair immune system functioning; increase the likelihood of learning and developmental disabilities; and cause gross neurological impairments; hyperactivity; depression; and the alteration of sex hormones.

Phillip Landrigan, MD, professor at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, focused on the unique vulner-

ability of children to toxic chemicals. Because children are not just little adults, exposure to toxic chemicals can have a greater effect on the body of a child than that of an adult. Dr. Landrigan cited several chronic illnesses and disorders like asthma, cancer, obesity, and developmental disabilities that are all on the rise and all may have environmental factors that contribute to their occurrence.

He proposed various steps to prevent disease in children including improving toxic testing, banning certain harmful chemicals, ensuring standards protect children's health, as well as educating doctors about environmental factors that can impact health. Landrigan also talked about a proposal to create Centers of Excellence across New York State to help parents with children who have been exposed to environmental toxins as well as doctors that are unfamiliar with the different conditions that can arise after an environmental exposure has occurred.

Katrina Korfmacher, PhD, from the Environmental Health Sciences Center of the University of Rochester, discussed the importance of educating the public about environment health. She highlighted two programs, Get Lead Out as well as the Rochester Healthy Homes programs that sought to educate the public about several hazards that existed in their homes in an effort to help them get rid of these hazards.

CEHP members: American Academy of Pediatrics, District 2; Clean New York; The Columbia Center for Children's Health and the Environment; Community Health and Environment Coalition; Grassroots Environmental Education; Great Neck Breast Cancer Coalition; Healthy Schools Network; Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition; Learning Disabilities Association of New York State; LDA of Western NY; LDA of Central NY; LDA of the Southern Tier; LDA of NYC; LDA of the Capital District/Wildwood Programs; Learning Disabilities Life and Learning Services; Mt. Sinai School of Medicine; NYSARC; NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council; NYSUT; WE ACT; Univ. of Rochester Medical Center; State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Environmental Health and Developmental Disabilities

In another morning session, Brenda Afzal, RN, MS, from the University of Maryland School of Nursing discussed the chemical pollutants that children encounter on a daily basis as well as the health effects associated with exposures to these dangerous chemicals. She discussed the myth many believe the government would not allow products that contain toxic chemicals to be sold. However, as she explained, there are no pre-market health tests or approval requirements for the products that are sold in stores, resulting in a wide array of recalls after a product is deemed unsafe. While there have been studies that document the health effects related to these exposures, Afzal believes more needs to be done to protect the health of children across the U.S.

Laura Abulafia, MHS, from the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities discussed the linkage between environmental exposures and the occurrence of intellectual and developmental disabilities. Abulafia explained there is a complex relationship between exposure to neurotoxins and the occurrence of developmental disabilities and the need for further exploration of this relationship to then help educate people about these environmental threats. People with developmental disabilities are more likely to suffer from secondary health problems, thus making them more vulnerable than the general public to the effect of toxic chemicals and substances. With developmental disabilities on the rise, it is important to look at the unique behaviors of children with developmental disabilities to better understand how exposure to toxic chemicals can negatively impact their already compromised body systems.

Protecting Children from Toxic Chemicals found in Various Products

The afternoon panel discussion, put together by Kathy Curtis from Clean NY, highlighted many issues related to products that are sold and used by children. With various companies recalling products after lead or other toxic substances have been found in them, now is the time to work towards ensuring products do not contain chemicals or substances that cause harm

Jean Halloran, (Brooklyn, NY) a representative from the Consumers Union spoke about different products that have recently been recalled because they contain harmful chemicals like lead. She said this is a large issue to tackle, often dealing with products or pieces of these products that are imported.

While toys and jewelry have been the most recent culprits, other products that contain harmful chemicals or pose a danger to children include baby bibs and bottles. To help educate parents about the hazards posed, the Consumers Union has begun a Not in My Cart Campaign that has taken part in various activities to help parents.

Ted Potrikus (Albany, NY)

from the Retail Council of NYS spoke about Senator Fushcillo's bill that would make it illegal for stores to sell recalled products. He also highlighted the importance of communicating with consumers about the hazards some of these products present as well as helping the retailers find out where products are coming from and then educating them as to what to do with a recalled product.

Steffi Domike (Pittsburgh, PA) from the United Steelworkers spoke about importing unsafe products that were produced in a country where standards are much lower as well as the lack of control we in the U.S. have over these products that are being imported.

Sally Edwards (Lowell, MA) from the Lowell Center for Sustainable Production spoke about the need for practical solutions to this growing problem. The Lowell Center has been working on a Sustainable Children's Product Initiative and feels the time is right to work on these important issues. She highlighted the need for a life cycle evaluation of these products

to determine their overall safety.

Cecil Corbin Mark (WE ACT for Environmental Justice, NY, NY) spoke about the prevalence of harmful chemicals in both the African American and Latino communities and highlighted the need for education and outreach to help these communities. He also spoke about the need to look at this issue through a broader lens and to avoid blaming one country or company. Rather he suggested taking a look at the manufacturers to get a better picture of what is going on.

Kathy Curtis (Schenectady, NY) from Clean NY focused on the need for strong and harmonized policies to tackle this very large, complicated issue. She also highlighted the importance of states stepping in to correct this problem.

This panel highlighted the need to protect children from products that contain harmful chemicals and the Partnership is now working towards putting the information learned throughout the day in action to ensure children are protected in New York State.