



Coalition *for* Healthier Schools

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Coordinated by Healthy Schools Network

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REDUCING RISKS TO SCHOOL CHILDREN – IGNORED TOO LONG

New National Report Documents Risks, Urges Federal-State Actions Back to School Toolkit Helps Reduce Environmental Risks

(National, August 10) “Today the Coalition is releasing a new national report and call to action to reduce environmental health risks to children in our schools and child care centers”, said **Claire L. Barnett, Executive Director of the Healthy Schools Network** and **coordinator of the Coalition**. “We urge the state and federal health and environment agencies to tackle the risks children face every day in every school in every zip code from lead, radon, PCBs, toxic chemicals, and disaster damages to schools.”

Said **pediatrician Jerome Paulson, MD, FAAP**, Emeritus Professor of Pediatrics at George Washington University, “This report gives a peek into the impact of environmental factors on the health of children in our nation’s schools. It clearly shows the need for a comprehensive, systematic data collection system.”

Added **Georges C. Benjamin, MD, Executive Director, American Public Health Association**, “The root of public health is prevention. Today children in schools are faced more than ever with environment and social challenges that affect both their health and their ability to learn. The good news is that many of these environmental and social challenges can be modified or prevented, sometimes at no new costs or with adequate investments. These are investments in our children's future, as they are our most precious resource.”

Commented **John Schlitt, President, School-Based Health Alliance**, “How can we expect our children to thrive in sick schools? We can—and must—do better to systematically remedy the toxic environments where young people learn, play, and grow.”

Learning Disabilities Association of America’s Healthy Children’s Project Coordinator Tracy Gregoire said, “We have a duty to protect our children and their future by taking immediate action on dangerous chemicals like lead in drinking water.”

Said **Stephany Mason, PhD, Technical Director, Collaborative for High Performance Schools**, “CHPS strongly supports, and is proud to be a member of, the Coalition for Healthier Schools' efforts to bring awareness to the dire condition of school buildings across the nation and recommendations to improve them and to reduce risks to children." CHPS co-chaired the Coalition’s 2012-13 work group on tracking conditions of school facilities and children.

The 4th edition of the triennial report documents risks to children in every state and provides updated data on children at risk from lead in school drinking water, from proximity to hazardous facilities, and identifies states that failed to respond to federal requests for how they are handling asbestos management in schools. The report also presents culled media reports from all the states documenting environmental risks at

schools and cites enrollments. Also included are the results of first-ever interviews with state and local health officials on how they manage children with suspected exposures.

In the states there were additional comments from experienced advocates.

Chip Halverson, ND, of Portland, Oregon and a cofounder of the National Education Association's Healthy Schools Caucus, said, "New reports of arsenic, cadmium, chromium and radon in school air and water have parents feeling betrayed. The press has done an amazing job helping uncover the details of how this could happen in our "green" city. We are committed to reducing the risks to children and to all personnel."

Added **Tolle Graham, Labor Environment Coordinator for the Massachusetts Coalition on Occupational Safety and Health**, "This snapshot of data on school buildings across the country should raise alarm. The report calls upon us at the state level to advocate for better coordination of the agencies and departments responsible for managing different environmental, health and safety hazards in our schools. The silo approach to managing hazards in our schools puts our children and school staff at risk, every day."

Ruth Kerzee, MSPH, Executive Director of the Illinois-based Midwest Pesticide Action Center, added, "The risks are too great to not address the health and safety issues plaguing our nation's schools. Kudos to the Coalition for highlighting these challenges as well as possible solutions."

"Every parent in every zip code should use the **Back to School Toolkit** to take action to reduce chemical and other risks to children attending PK-12 schools", said Claire Barnett. "Our partners have also recommended that, due to the cross-cutting issues in environmental health at school, only a strong, defined partnership between the federal and state environment and health agencies, advised experienced advocates and educators, can address the risks and benchmark prevention at schools. No family wants their children's attendance and achievement damaged by the environmental conditions of the school they are required to attend."

For more information:

- New report with data and pictures from every state, see *Towards Healthy Schools: Reducing Risks to Children* at <http://www.healthyschools.org/documents/TowardsHealthySchools-Risks.pdf>
- For help Reducing Risks, see **Back to School Toolkit** at <http://www.healthyschools.org/coalitionactionkit.html>
- See the back to school blog "*Will Your School Building Be Safe for Your Child?*" in the **Huffington Post** at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/claire-l-barnett/its-back-to-school-time-w_1_b_11306198.html
- *Environmental Health at School: Ignored Too Long*, a conference report is at http://www.healthyschools.org/documents/SUMMARY_FINAL.pdf

The **Coalition for Healthier Schools** provides the platform and the forum for environmental health at school and has some 150 participating NGOs and hundreds of other members. It is coordinated by **Healthy Schools Network**. The Network is a national not for profit established in New York in 1995 whose collaborative efforts have resulted in child-protective reforms and new federal and state funding for school facilities and for children's health.

For more information, see www.HealthySchools.org.

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