

School Environmental Health and Safety

September 2008



At the August 27, 2008 meeting of the State Board of Health, board members expressed interest in learning about Department of Health's current efforts for educating and training school and local health jurisdiction (LHJ) staff in school environmental health and safety. Members also expressed an interest in the department's plan for implementing the proposed updates to the Board's health and safety rules for K-12 schools.

Current Education and Outreach

Since 2004, the Department of Health School Environmental Health and Safety Program has sponsored a series of annual **Fall Workshops** in the nine Educational Service District (ESD) regions throughout the state. These free workshops are designed to provide school administrators and LHJ staff with current information on environmental health and safety issues related to schools. The workshops cover the following topics:

- Indoor Air Quality
- Noise & Hearing Protection
- Injury Prevention
- Hazardous Materials / High Hazard Chemicals
- Healthy, Sustainable, Safe Cleaning
- Integrated Pest Management
- Animals in Schools / Animal & Vector Borne Diseases
- Asthma Management in the School Setting
- Pandemic Flu / Communicable & Emerging Diseases / MRSA
- EPA's *Tools for Schools* and *HealthySEAT—School Environments Assessment Tool*
- Emergency Preparedness / Shelter-in-Place Planning
- Update on the School Rule Revision (WAC 246-366)

These workshops are collaborative events, and include presentations by topic area experts from local school districts, ESDs, clean air agencies, local hazardous waste management, LHJs, state agencies, and the Department of Health. The ESDs in Wenatchee, Renton, and Spokane have presented the workshops via the K-20 Video Conferencing network, improving participation by remote districts. Attendance at these workshops has steadily increased, as more school districts and LHJs seek up-to-date knowledge about key school health and safety matters.

Current Technical Assistance and Guidance

Department staff provides technical assistance to those who must comply with the Board's Primary and Secondary School rules Chapter 246-366, WAC; and are available for on-site consultations. Staff works with LHJs, school districts, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, private schools, agencies, and non-profits to promote incorporation of environmental health and safety standards and practices into school facility design, operation, and maintenance. The program maintains a website with information about how to identify and respond to potential health and safety hazards in the school environment. The program also develops and updates technical guidance materials, including the *Health and Safety Guide for K-12 Schools in Washington*, and the *School Indoor Air Quality Best Management Practices Manual*.

Identified Training Needs

Schools and local health jurisdiction staff need specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the school rule requirements and to address hazards in the school setting. Environmental health and safety training needs include:

- site evaluation and construction plan review
- playground surfaces, equipment design and installation
- safe use, storage and disposal of chemicals in labs
- accident prevention in career and technical shops
- noise control, adequate lighting, safety
- drinking water quality sampling
- indoor air quality evaluation and control
- mold prevention and remediation
- integrated pest management
- sanitation and cleaning for health

Future Activity

In response to this need for trained personnel in schools and local health jurisdictions, the department will need additional program resources to:

- Develop curricula and provide training to school and LHJ staff, statewide, on an on-going basis, with at least five courses addressing key topics:
 - Fundamentals of School Environmental Health and Safety
 - Inspection Methods and Materials
 - Site Evaluation and Plan Review
 - Laboratory and Shop Safety
 - Playground Safety and Inspection
- Develop and update guidance materials, including the *Health and Safety Guide for K-12 Schools in Washington State*, and the *School Indoor Air Quality Best Management Practices Manual*;
- Design model programs, standards of practice, inspection methods, and checklists;
- Provide on-going technical assistance and consultation;
- Establish a technical advisory committee to promote consistent statewide interpretation and implementation of the updated rules; and
- Collect, analyze, and share data on environmental health and safety conditions in Washington schools.

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