

CT Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools

A nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting policies, practices and resources that protect school occupants from environmental health hazards

www.pollutionfreeschools.org

Press Release

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In recognition of National Healthy Schools Day, the Connecticut Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools (ConnFESS) in conjunction with the National Coalition for Healthier Schools is promoting the use of "Green Clean" maintenance practices and products in schools. Commonly used cleaning products contain toxic chemicals that are associated with cancer, reproductive disorders, eye and skin damage and respiratory disorders such as asthma. Industrial strength cleaning products used in many schools pose a particular risk to children of all ages, especially those with sensitive airways and other health issues. Toxic cleaning products also present a significant threat to custodial staff who handle them directly. One custodian uses on average 194 chemicals a year, 25% of which are hazardous substances. NIOSH reports that 12% of work related asthma is the result of exposure to cleaning products.

In 2006, Governor Rell issued Executive Order #14 which requires all state agencies to purchase cleaning and sanitizing products that minimize potential impacts to human health and the environment. The Executive Order "encourages" school districts to review their purchasing and use of cleaning products. The CT General Assembly considered two bills during the current session that would have extended the requirement to use Green Clean to school districts. HB6396, an Environment Committee bill, removed legislative language that would have also required school districts to follow the same guidelines established by the Department of Administrative Services for Executive Order #14. "Such legislative language would have afforded CT's school children and employees the same protection from indoor air pollution caused by toxic cleaning products currently provided to state workers" remarked Diane Ethier, President of ConnFESS. A similar bill, HB7096 from the Education Committee, was designed to protect school children from harmful pesticide exposures and toxic cleaning chemicals. This bill was successfully voted out of the Education and Appropriations Committees and awaits action by the CT House of Representatives. Ethier testified in favor of the original language presented in HB 6396 and HB 7096 that called for school districts to use Green Clean maintenance practices and products. (See www.pollutionfreeschools.org under Legislative Updates.)

Fortunately, a number of school districts have taken the lead on this issue and have already begun the process of replacing toxic cleaners with safer alternatives. Nine school districts who are "Keen on Green Clean" are profiled on the ConnFESS website. (See Green Clean link and CT map.) They include Amity Regional School District #5, Fairfield, Farmington, Lyme-Old Lyme Regional School District #18, Montville, Ridgefield, Simsbury, Stratford and Torrington. Facilities managers for each of these districts describe what products, equipment and procedures they are using as well as provide tips as to how other schools might adopt this approach. These school districts show how safer and environmentally preferable cleaning is readily available and easy to use. Diane Ethier explained that "Studies have shown these safer products are just as effective as or better than toxic cleaners, and in many cases are less expensive. Switching to safer cleaners can significantly save money, improve indoor air quality and reduce cleaning related health problems."