

## *National Healthy Schools Day*

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### **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](http://www.pollutionfreeschools.org)

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#### *Press Release*

**For immediate release:**

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In recognition of National Healthy Schools Day, April 24, 2006, the CT Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools (ConnFESS) will release its new 2006 Advocacy Checklist. ConnFESS is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting policies, practices and resources that protect school occupants from environmental health hazards. Its grassroots members played a central role in shaping and passing An Act Concerning Indoor Air Quality in Schools (PA 03-220) in 2003. This law mandates that local and regional boards of education adopt and implement an indoor air quality (IAQ) program.

The 2006 Advocacy Checklist provides updated information regarding Connecticut laws that deal with environmental health issues such as pesticides, bus idling and indoor air quality. The checklist also suggests steps parents and school staff can take to assess how effectively a school is adopting and implementing its IAQ program.

From 2000-2004 severe mold contamination in three Connecticut schools: McKinley Elementary (Fairfield), Plainfield High School (Plainfield) and Staples Elementary (Easton) illustrated how poor management of IAQ issues (e.g. failure to replace a leaky roof) can cause serious health and financial consequences. Health consequences included students requiring homebound instruction and emergency medical care as well as teachers who had to accept early or disability retirement due to lung disease linked by physicians to poor IAQ in the schools. All three schools had to be permanently shut down and replaced by newly constructed buildings causing tax increases in each municipality. Ongoing maintenance and repairs would have only cost a fraction of the cost of new construction. When McKinley and Staples Elementary had to be evacuated during the school year, school occupants had to be relocated to other buildings, significantly disrupting the school routine. Unfortunately, all three school systems had to learn the hard way that adopting and implementing an effective IAQ program is the most important way to prevent the need for such crisis intervention and gaining the reputation as an IAQ worst-case scenario.

ConnFESS recommends that all school systems in Connecticut adopt and implement the EPA's Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program (TfS). By contacting Kenny Foscue at the CT Department of Public Health (860-509-7742), head of the CT School Indoor Environment Resource Team (CSIERT), school districts can receive free training in order to establish this effective indoor air quality program.

In the six years that CSIERT has been providing IAQ trainings to school districts, many districts have demonstrated that using the TfS program has led to improved health and increased attendance in their schools. In Chester, the number of both asthma and IAQ-related health visits and absenteeism decreased after TfS was implemented. In the first year of using TfS, Hamden reported fewer IAQ-related health complaints and decreases in absenteeism and in the use of student inhalers. Hartford schools reported that the number of asthma incidents declined after their TfS-suggested improvements that included removal of

carpeting and repairs to pipes and roofs. North Haven saw a decrease in respiratory-related illnesses and in health clinic visits two years after TfS was implemented. In Waterford, TfS led to a decrease in IAQ health complaints for students and staff.

“Addressing school indoor air quality issues is an important part of the overall strategy to reduce the impact of asthma in Connecticut. Reducing asthma triggers in schools is a major component of the American Lung Association of Connecticut’s Asthma Friendly Schools initiative, a comprehensive asthma management program.” Angela Testa, Director, School and Community Asthma Programs.