



Children First

A healthy environment for our future.



Children First

“When a three-year-old boy inhales sooty fumes from a Boston city bus, he is much more likely than his mother or father to suffer an asthma attack. When a three-year-old girl eats bass from a river in Maine, she is far more vulnerable than an adult to the toxic effects of mercury. Pound for pound, children drink more milk and water, breathe more air and eat more food than adults.”

—Mindy Lubber
Regional Administrator
EPA New England

Because children are so vulnerable to environmental problems, the New England Office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has launched a coordinated campaign called Children First, to reduce asthma, lead poisoning and other diseases that are prevalent among children and have an environmental basis. This campaign is focused on creating healthier environments in the three places children spend most of their time—at home, in schools and outdoors.

The campaign was launched in September 2000 with a Safe Schools initiative to create healthier and safer classrooms, science labs and playgrounds for our children. It continues with the Healthy Homes agenda, designed to limit children's exposure to such toxics as lead paint and second-hand smoke, as well as the indoor air pollution that aggravates asthma. Finally, the campaign is dedicated to a cleaner outdoors, achieved by reducing the contaminants that poison the air our children breathe, the ground they play on and the water they drink.

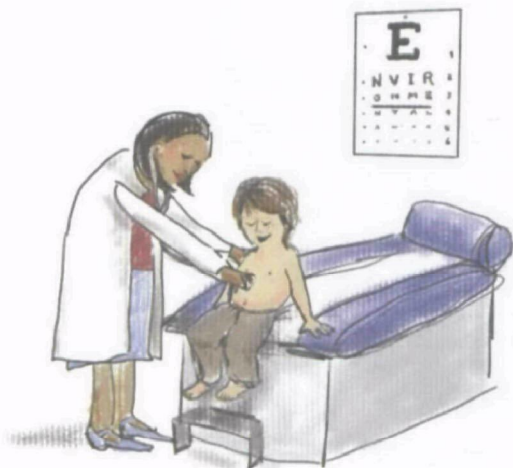
Safer Schools

► **TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS:** New England's school buildings suffer from a variety of environmental problems, including poor maintenance and inappropriate cleaning products, that make our children ill. EPA's Tools for Schools program helps educators and administrators identify ways to improve indoor air quality. According to a 1995 General Accounting Office report, more than half the schools in this country have poor ventilation and significant sources of pollution. In 2000 and beyond, EPA New England will enlist an additional 200 schools a year to undertake the Tools for Schools program.

www.epa.gov/region01/eco/iaq

► **TOXICS-FREE SCHOOLS:** Schools use chemicals in classrooms, science laboratories and vocational shops as well as in facility maintenance. Toxic chemicals such as mercury are also prevalent in medical equipment, lighting, and electrical devices in schools. Many educators are unaware of the potential dangers posed by chemicals and don't know how to make better choices in the types and quantities of chemicals brought into the school. Through workshops, visits to high schools and vocational schools, EPA New England will educate teachers and administrators on safer use, storage, and disposal of chemicals and equipment.

www.epa.gov/region01/steward/necat/voc.html



Healthy Homes

▶ **LEAD SAFE YARDS:** New England's children are particularly at risk for lead poisoning because the region's older wooden houses often contain lead paint and lead-contaminated yards. In some urban neighborhoods, up to 40 percent of children have elevated blood lead levels. EPA New England's pilot Lead Safe Yards project has already tested 50 Boston yards for lead and made them safe, paving the way for similar programs throughout New England and the nation. Communities nationwide have been invited to apply for funding for similar lead safe yard programs. EPA New England also works with community activists interested in setting up similar programs.

www.epa.gov/region01/leadsafe

▶ **LEAD ENFORCEMENT:** EPA New England recently made lead paint a priority by creating a team to enforce laws requiring that landlords inform tenants of the presence of lead paint. Dovetailing with this effort, EPA recently changed its policy to make it easier for landlords to dispose of lead paint. Lead paint debris is no longer classified as hazardous waste by the federal government, and can now be thrown away more cheaply and easily with regular garbage, where state and local laws permit.



► **ASTHMA REDUCTION:** Asthma affects at least 5 million children and costs the US economy \$11 billion a year. It is responsible for 10 million missed school days each year. The rate of asthma attacks among children has doubled in the last decade, and has become the leading cause of hospitalization of children. EPA New England's Asthma Summit for the first time drew together federal and state agencies along with private health groups and asthma coalitions to address this issue. The group pledged to track asthma rates in children; promote new building guidelines for healthier indoor spaces; and create a council to recommend policy aimed at reducing asthma. EPA New England is also funding organizations that teach families at home and in health centers how to reduce the risks of asthma attacks.

www.epa.gov/children/asthma.htm

► **KEEPING TAP WATER CLEAN:** Every community water supplier in the nation is required to issue a public report so that families know the quality of the water flowing from their taps. Suppliers that don't provide those annual reports are being cited by EPA New England, the only region in the country to do so.

www.epa.gov/safewater/kids/health.html

► **SECOND-HAND SMOKE CAMPAIGN:** Through a blitz of letters and marketing, EPA New England has encouraged day care providers and parents not to smoke around children. The agency is launching a massive publicity campaign that includes mailings to alert New England teachers and day care workers to the particular dangers of smoking around children. EPA New England also supports community groups who educate low income and minority families in urban areas about the dangers of second-hand smoke, especially in combination with other contaminants.

www.epa.gov/iaq/ets.html



Cleaner Outdoors

► **PESTICIDES:** Children are exposed to harmful pesticides from residues on food, in schools and at playgrounds as well as from common home uses of fertilizers, pesticides and rodenticides. Successful alternatives can minimize the use of chemicals and EPA is educating citizens about these alternatives through consumer education and clearer label instructions. EPA is also working with community groups to develop programs to educate residents on safe use of pesticides.

www.epa.gov/pesticides/consumer.htm

► **AIR QUALITY ALERTS:** Air pollution causes lung and other respiratory diseases and threatens the health of our children. Every summer, New England suffers from dozens of days with unhealthy air. EPA New England gives hot weather reports on air quality to the public through the media and through electronic messages to 1,000 camps, daycare centers and individuals. Tighter air pollution laws have resulted in significant improvements. A decade ago, New England suffered nearly three times as many days as today with poor air quality. Changes in regulations continue to make improvements. Recently, EPA proposed tougher emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles that would significantly reduce smog-causing emissions from trucks and buses.

www.epa.gov/region01/eco/airqual

Air monitors in Boston and Portland, Maine, evaluate air toxics, ozone and tiny particles and give real time air quality statistics back to the public on a web page. In Portland, technology funded by EPA measures air toxics in a congested area. In Boston, monitors that work 24 hours a day have been established in two dense urban neighborhoods where children suffer from high asthma and lead poisoning rates. Students from a nearby high school raise colored flags to alert people to the air quality.

www.epa.gov/region01/oms

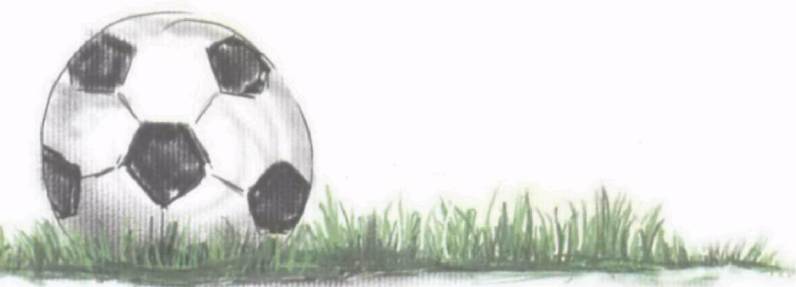
► **MERCURY:** About one in four children nationally is exposed to mercury at unsafe levels. Mercury exposure may lead to irreversible neurological effects. Most of these children are exposed because their mothers were not aware during pregnancy of the dangers of eating fish contaminated with mercury. Across New England, more than 80 percent of the inland waters have fish too polluted with mercury to eat. EPA is working to reduce the presence of mercury in the environment, through such programs as Partners for Change Mercury Challenge, which has encouraged hospitals to reduce mercury waste entirely by the year 2003. The program has already eliminated hundreds of pounds of mercury from New England's environment. One mercury thermometer can contaminate up to 25,000 gallons of water. EPA New England is also teaching parents the dangers of mercury and mercury poisoning.


www.epa.gov/region01/steward/necat/mercury

► **VACANT LOTS:** Empty lots are a significant risk to children in urban areas because of illegal dumping of waste that may include lead and arsenic. In Providence, home to 4,000 vacant and abandoned lots, EPA works with local officials and community groups to sample and transfer these lots to local residents for the cost of one dollar. Through this program, a national model, urban eyesores are turned into flower gardens, parks and open spaces for the community's enjoyment.

www.brown.edu/Departments/Environmental_Studies/summit

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► **SUNWISE:** Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation can cause serious health effects, including skin cancer and other skin disorders, eye damage and cataracts, and immune system suppression. One in five Americans develops skin cancer. Every hour one person dies from this disease. The incidence of melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, is increasing faster than almost any other form of cancer. Most of the average person's lifetime sun exposure occurs before the age of 18. Boston is one of three pilot cities for a national EPA program teaching children the dangers of ultra violet ray exposure from the sun. EPA New England distributes information to parents, teachers, recreation directors and camp counselors so caretakers can help children avoid the harm of these rays.

www.epa.gov/sunwise

► **SMART GROWTH:** EPA New England helps communities grow in ways that use less land and natural resources and that encourage walkable, safe neighborhoods. EPA has developed an educational program for local officials that helps them reshape development in ways that benefit the community, including creating streets that are safer for kids to walk and bike. EPA has helped fund a program in Maine that shows developers and municipalities the market for neighborhoods characterized by such features as walkability, distinct neighborhood boundaries, protection from excessive traffic and noise and a mixture of homes and services that residents can use. And across New England, EPA is helping communities make smart decisions about where to locate schools, playgrounds and parks, ensuring that children are not exposed to environmental risks in the neighborhood.

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Notes

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Making it happen.

PARTNERSHIPS

Community non-profit groups are gateways into New England communities. Local organizations help families and those who care for children learn to avoid lead poisoning, improve asthma management and seek out the help they need to make children healthier. Since 1997, EPA New England has invested \$1.7 million in these programs, including nearly \$400,000 in grants directed to disadvantaged urban neighborhoods, neighborhoods of color and people whose first language is not English. EPA New England also achieves greater environmental benefit thru partnerships with businesses as well as state and local governments. Examples of EPA initiatives that link with community non-profits include:

- *The Urban Environmental Initiative* addresses a range of environmental and public health problems in Boston, Hartford, and Providence. City residents are exposed to many environmental risks and public health hazards, which together cause a disproportionate percentage of diseases, compared to rural and suburban residents. Many of which are preventable. Through this program, EPA helps the community protect its own environment and solve urban problems. **www.epa.gov/region01/eco/uei**

- *The Regional Coordinating Council*, chaired by EPA, the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development integrates a children's environmental health agenda into the core of the region's housing, health and education agencies. These agencies working together have the best chance of creating healthier homes and communities for New England's children.

- *The New England Lead Coordinating Committee*, a joint state and federal group, meets four times a year to coordinate among New England states, EPA and other federal agencies to prevent lead poisoning. Efforts include the "Keep It Clean Campaign" to teach lead safe home renovation methods.

CHILD-BASED STANDARDS

EPA is committed to setting national standards for smog, soot and water quality, as well as pesticides, at levels that protect children. For example, new air quality standards for ozone and particulate matter were set two years ago to protect children from asthma attacks. EPA is now looking at all approved pesticides to ensure that children are protected from exposure to pesticides. At Superfund sites, cleanup decisions are being made with the standards safe for children in mind.

EDUCATION

Right-to-Know: Citizens have the right to know about the chemicals used and released in the communities where their children live and grow. A public that has access to information will be more able and willing to participate in decisions to control hazards. EPA New England is committed to bringing information to the public through real time air monitors and expanded web pages. EPA New England will work this year to redesign and expand its web pages to make information more accessible and useable for residents. www.epa.gov/region01/steward/emergencyplan/right.html

Outreach: Educated parents, teachers, business leaders and health professionals are critical to creating healthier homes, schools and playgrounds. EPA employees work actively with each of these groups to make sure citizens and families are aware of the best ways to create and protect a healthy and safe environment. www.epa.gov/region01/students/teacher

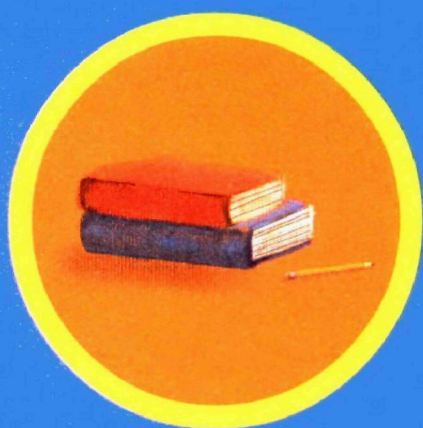
SOUND SCIENCE

Measuring Success

By mapping air quality, health outcomes, and available socio-economic data, EPA will be able to chart progress in treating and managing asthma. Public health surveillance and programs to monitor exposures to toxic substances provide opportunities to follow trends, identify clusters, study causes, and plan preventive and service programs.

State-of-the art research

EPA will control chemical exposures from Superfund sites, landfills, and industry. Recent science has shown that exposure to many neurotoxins is unsafe at levels once thought acceptable. www.epa.gov/children/whatwe/scientific.htm



Making it
happen.

Combining education, child-based standards, partnerships and sound science EPA New England is making the Children First campaign work for you.