

## 11.25 Mitigating Environmental Hazards and Contaminants in Schools

*Resolution passed 2016*

**Whereas**, the school environment impacts learning for all children. Educational achievement is directly linked to students' health and their learning environment. Schools have a responsibility to use products with safer chemicals to promote a healthy school environment. Implementing green cleaning programs and integrated pest management in schools has many benefits, and chief among them is helping students stay healthy and ready to learn. A school rule to establish minimum environmental standards for schools was 'frozen' in 2008. This rule encouraged solutions to pest prevention, maintenance, capital improvements, and other physical improvements. It also provided funds for schools to test water for lead and other contaminants. Reinstating and revamping this rule would safeguard the health of over one million students; and

**Whereas**, children are at greater risk as their small size results in a higher concentration of pollutant exposure. Children exhibit behaviors that put them at greater risk – they play on the floor or grass, for example, where pesticides are commonly applied. They are more vulnerable to lifelong detrimental effects of chemical toxins, because developing hormonal, neurological, and other systems can be disrupted by pesticides and other chemicals. This can result in long-term negative health effects (Williams, Linker, Waldvogel, Leidy, & Schal, 2005). The EPA states that concentrations of air contaminants are often found to be two to five times higher indoors than outdoors due to the tighter buildings, reduction in outdoor air brought into schools for ventilation, reduced maintenance budgets, and the proliferation of indoor sources of contaminants. Chronic absence in kindergarten is strongly associated with lower reading and math performance in fifth grade for poor children (Chang and Romero, 2008); and

**Whereas**, chemicals of concern exist in widely used products in schools. Chemicals such as herbicides/pesticides, bleach, ammonia, triclosan, quaternary ammonium compounds, fragrance, artificial dyes, and other chemicals typically found in hand soaps, sanitizers, wipes, and commercial cleaning agents are commonly used in school settings. Teachers, staff, custodians and sometimes students use these products even though they are proven or suspected to exert neurological, psychiatric, developmental, hormonal, reproductive, and/or carcinogenic effects (Kroger, 2005) (Kerry & Kroger, 2012) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Schools/EnvironmentalHealth>); and

**Whereas**, less toxic and cost-comparable product alternatives are widely available. Less toxic and cost-effective alternatives exist for cleaning, managing pests, procuring art and science supplies, etc. These safer alternatives are now widely available. For cleaning products, third-party certifications Green Seal, UL ECOLOGO, and the EPA's Safer Choice program have health-promoting criteria and are regulated by respected third-party organizations. While green chemicals used to cost more, in today's market, costs are similar or in many cases even less than traditional products. And schools can save when switching to equipment and processes that are more efficient and effective for custodial staff; and

**Whereas**, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) policies in schools is supported by the National PTA. IPM has been found to reduce pesticide use by 71% and reduce pest complaints by 78% to 90% with no increase in costs (Gouge, Lame and Snyder, 2006). IPM is a long-term policy solution, and when coupled with individualized technical assistance to schools, these policies can improve indoor air quality, improve test scores and reduce absenteeism (Chambers, et al, 2011); and

**Whereas**, state laws and district policies mandating safer chemicals in cleaning and pest management programs provide a clear framework to ensure healthy school environment standards. Washington state should follow the lead of the more than 12 states that have adopted green cleaning legislation or safer chemical legislation in schools. A summary of those laws can be found [here](#). In some cases, districts have adopted broad guidelines for safer chemical use, for example, in the Palo Alto Unified School District. Integrative Pest Management (IPM) in schools has been mandated in Oregon, Arizona, California, and Illinois, among others (see EPA strategic plan: <https://www3.epa.gov/pestwise/ipminschoools/strategicplan.pdf>); and

**Whereas**, pediatricians and health agencies call for safer chemical policies in schools. In 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a strong statement that children should not be exposed to any pesticides and recommended IPM as a solution to reduce risk (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012). Similarly, the Washington State Department of Health has reinforced these findings and concluded that pesticide exposure reduces school student performance. Additionally, in the fall of 2014, a recommendation letter signed by the EPA, Washington State Department of Health, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Washington State University Extension, collectively recommended that schools implement IPM as a means to reduce pesticide exposure and protect the health of children in Washington state. IPM is encouraged nationally by the EPA to reduce pesticide use in schools (Center of Expertise for School IPM, 2014).

**Therefore, be it**

**Resolved**, that Washington State PTA supports adoption and enforcement of legislation and policies that improve environmental health in schools with safer chemical use, specifically in school cleaning programs, pest management, and grounds maintenance, and work to update and support minimum environmental standards for all educational facilities; and be it further

**Resolved**, that Washington State PTA should support all efforts to implement safer chemical policies at the state and school district levels. This can include advocating for minimum environmental health standards for all of Washington state, IPM in schools, and green cleaning policies that focus on safer procurement of cleaning supplies for district and school custodial staff as well as purchasing lists used by parents for classroom supplies; and be it further

**Resolved**, that Washington State PTA encourages and calls for members, policymakers in government, inter-governmental bodies and non-governmental, school and community organizations to raise awareness to reduce and mitigate environmental hazards in schools; and be it further

**Resolved**, that in recognizing that every Washingtonian is accumulating a body burden of toxic chemicals associated with health impacts, we call for appropriate policies that ensure that only the safest chemicals are used in all schools, and we call for efforts to update and support stronger environmental standards in schools.