

VERMONT2007

School Environmental Health

Report to the Legislature on **Act 125 (2000)**
January 15, 2008



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Agency of Human Services

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Executive Summary

Act 125, an act relating to toxic materials and indoor air quality in Vermont public schools, was enacted in 2000 and requires the Commissioners of Health, Education, and Buildings and General Services to file an annual report with the House and Senate Committees on Education.

This report is being made on behalf of all three Commissioners.

The annual report is to cover:

- The extent of indoor air and hazardous exposure problems in Vermont schools; and
- The percentage of Vermont schools that have established a school environmental health program or qualified for environmental health certification.

Problems in Schools

In calendar year 2006, the program received approximately 40 reports of school environmental health problems. Many schools presented multiple issues, however, a majority of the calls were related to mold, construction, heating and ventilation systems, odors, and other indoor air quality complaints. Calls were also received related to pest management, chemicals, drinking water, and fire hazards.

Schools' Accomplishments

During 2006:

- Seven schools received their first Certificate of Achievement for Environmental Health in Schools, and one school was recertified.
- Eight new schools participated in school-based environmental health initiatives.

- Through 2006, 7% of Vermont schools have been awarded a Certificate of Achievement, and approximately 40% have participated in some form of environmental health initiative.

Indoor Air and Hazardous Exposure Problems

Per Act 125, the Envision program in the Vermont Department of Health was developed to assist schools to create and implement environmental health management plans by educating schools on environmental health issues, and providing schools with a sustainable means to identify, prevent, and “problem-solve” potential environmental health and indoor air quality (IAQ) issues.

Envision provides:

- a model environmental health plan and policy
- a clearinghouse of environmental health information on the Department of Health’s website
- technical assistance to schools
- workshops on environmental health for school personnel
- grant funding to the Association of Vermont Recyclers to administer grants to Vermont schools and conduct cleaning product evaluations

In addition, the Envision program is charged with tracking the extent of indoor air and hazardous exposure problems in Vermont schools. In calendar year 2006, the program received approximately 40 reports of school environmental health problems. Many schools presented multiple issues, however, a majority of the calls were related to mold, construction, heating and ventilation systems, odors, and other indoor air quality complaints. Calls were also received related to pest management, chemicals, drinking water, and fire hazards.

Establishing School Environmental Health Programs

In 2006, the Vermont Department of Health was awarded a US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Healthy Communities grant of \$30,000 to provide technical grants to schools committed to developing environmental health plans and policies. These funds were combined with \$51,000 of one-time funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for asthma prevention. The total amount, \$81,000 was awarded to the Association of Vermont Recyclers (AVR) to meet Envision goals and administer grants to Vermont schools and partners.

Using federal funds, and in-kind support from partners, and the Health Department and its partners continue to offer schools environmental health trainings, workshops, and direct technical assistance to help schools to reduce hazardous materials. Since the inception of the Envision program, approximately 190 individuals (representing an estimated 107 schools or school districts/unions) have attended an Envision workshop.

The Vermont Envision Partnership, via the Association of Vermont Recyclers and Inform, Inc, performed more than 20 cleaning products evaluations to educate schools on green cleaning products and their use of these products in their maintenance practices. A written report followed each evaluation, including recommended steps to advance the school towards an Envision Certificate of Achievement.

Certificates of Achievement for Environmental Health

In May 2006, members of the Act 125 Advisory Panel and Health Department staff attended the Governor's Award Ceremony that honored seven schools that earned a Certificate of Achievement for Environmental Health in Schools. Requirements for certification and a listing of schools awarded a certificate are identified in the Appendix. Montpelier High School which completed an evaluation of all the Envision criteria and made numerous changes in their environmental health program noted an overall reduction in illnesses of 10-40% (depending on the specific symptom), and a reduction of asthma episodes by 50%. The Envision program plans to apply lessons learned, with other schools in the future.

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Envision Challenges and Opportunities

Establishing a school environmental health program and achieving certification require commitment from schools and financial support. Since federal and state funding is limited, Envision and Act 125 Advisory Panel continue to explore policy approaches that would improve environmental health in all schools statewide. These include adopting statewide policies on anti-idling on school grounds, green cleaning products, and HEPA vacuum cleaners.

In 2006, the Departments of Health and Education worked to introduce legislation anti-idling for school buses. As a result of the Departments' efforts, and assistance from many other parties, Act 48 was approved on May 25, 2007. The law provides that, subject to State Board of Education Rules (now in the administrative rule process) which may provide for limited idling, the operator of a school bus shall not idle the engine while waiting for children to board or exit the vehicle at a school and shall not start the engine until ready to leave the school premises.

Act 125 - School Environmental Health Certificate of Achievement - 2005/2006



	Schools							
	Robinson Elementary	Hinesburg Community	Berkshire Elementary	Montgomery Center	Montpelier High	Braintree Elementary	Lowell Graded	Troy Elementary
<i>*Environmental Health Policy</i>	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
<i>*Environmental Health Plan</i>	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
#Non Toxic/Least Toxic Policy	•		•		•			
#Int. Pest Management Program	•	•	•		•			•
#Workshop attendance	•		•		•	•	•	•
#Environmental Health Team	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
#HVAC Maintenance	•	•	•	•	•			•
#Communication Efforts	•	•	•		•	•		•
^Least/Non Toxic Products	•		•		•	•		•
^Int. Pest Management Steps	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
^Hazardous materials management		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
^Reduction of Asthma Triggers	•				•			
^Healthy/Green Cleaning	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
^Tested School for Radon					•			
^Student involvement	•		•	•	•	•		
^Mentor other Schools	•	•			•	•		
^Other		•	•	•	•	•		•

***Required to be eligible Certificate of Achievement # Component of EH Plan**

^Schools must complete 4 of 9 additional activities for Certificate of Achievement