

VERMONT2008

School Environmental Health

Report to the Legislature on **Act 125**
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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 submitted on behalf of all three Commissioners.

With regard to Act 125, this annual report covers:

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

Problems reported by Vermont schools

During calendar year 2007, the Envision program coordinator received approximately 45 reports of school environmental health problems. The majority of the calls were related to mold, heating and ventilation systems, odors, and occupant health complaints. Through Envision, school professionals have been trained to solve indoor air quality issues and to establish school environmental health programs.

Schools' Accomplishments

- Five schools received their first Certificate of Achievement for Environmental Health and eight schools were repeat recipients.
- Fourteen new schools participated in school-based environmental health initiatives.
- 9% of Vermont schools have met the criteria and have been awarded a Certificate of Achievement; however, approximately 45% of schools have identified and addressed environmental health issues.

Indoor Air and Hazardous Exposure Problems

As required by Act 125, the Envision program was developed by the Vermont Departments of Health, Education, and Buildings and General Services, with guidance from the Act 125 Advisory Panel. Envision encourages schools to develop programs to identify and eliminate potentially hazardous materials, isolate those hazardous materials that cannot be eliminated, and adequately ventilate school buildings to exhaust any pollutants and contaminants.

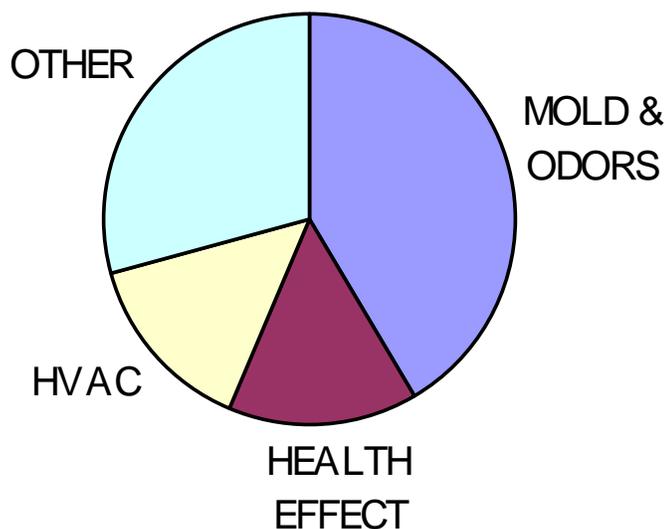
The Envision program resides in the Department of Health with one staff member. The program utilizes the Environmental Protection Agency's *Tools for Schools* kit and provides schools with the following:

1. Information on
 - a. common materials and practices that may affect indoor air quality and may negatively impact human health;
 - b. potential health problems associated with poor indoor air quality;
 - c. pest management and alternatives to chemical pest control;
 - d. methods to reduce potentially hazardous substances;
2. A model school environmental health policy and plan;
3. Technical assistance;
4. Grants to assist with start up costs for an environmental health program.

The Envision program measures the extent of indoor air and hazardous exposure problems by the number of calls received by the program manager -- about 45 to 50 calls per year. However, the number of these calls underestimates the true extent of indoor air quality issues because school staff typically do not seek assistance from the Envision program if they can resolve the problem either on their own, or with assistance from other state agencies or local health offices. During the next year, the Envision program plans to explore ways to capture all reports of school environmental health problems.

When the Department of Health is contacted, many schools report multiple issues. As in recent years, the majority of the calls are related to mold, odors, heating and ventilation systems, and health complaints. The program also provides technical assistance regarding integrated pest management, chemical use/storage, drinking water, and fire hazards.

Figure 1. Indoor Air Complaints



Establishing School Environmental Health Programs

For the past five years, the Envision program has been awarded a US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Healthy Communities grant ranging from \$30,000 - \$35,000.

Envision uses this grant to:

- Educate and mentor school environmental health teams on *Envision/Tools for Schools*;
- Assist school teams to develop an environmental management plan;
- Award school grants to assist with implementation costs;
- Provide educational materials regarding idling of diesel engines;
- Provide Act 125 partner grants to perform green cleaning product evaluations and school walk-through services.

During this reporting period, the Department of Health awarded nine (9) small grants to schools (about \$3000 each). In order to receive a grant, schools submitted proposals detailing how they intended to use the funds to improve the environmental health of their school. Use of grant funds included purchasing new HEPA vacuums, removing old carpeting and replacing flooring with environmentally preferable choices, and HVAC system maintenance.

In collaboration with the Department of Education, the Envision program distributed metal anti-idling signs to all 311 Vermont school buildings to support anti-idling

initiatives outlined in Act 48 (see Appendices A & B). In addition, Envision partners, Inform, Inc. and the Association of Vermont Recyclers, received grant funding to complete 12 evaluations of the cleaning products used in schools.

Certificates of Achievement for Environmental Health

Each year, the Vermont Departments of Health, Education and Buildings and General Services hold a Governor's Ceremony to honor those schools that have reached the benchmarks set forth by the Envision program and Advisory Panel entitling them to a Certificate of Achievement (see Appendix C). During this reporting period, the following 13 schools received certificates:

1. Robinson Elementary School, Starksboro
2. Hinesburg Community School, Hinesburg
3. Berkshire Elementary School, Berkshire
4. Montgomery Center School, Montgomery
5. Montpelier High School, Montpelier
6. Braintree Elementary School, Braintree
7. Troy Elementary School, Troy
8. Lowell Graded School, Lowell
9. Chamberlin Elementary School, South Burlington
10. Central School, South Burlington
11. Orchard School, South Burlington
12. F.H. Tuttle Middle School, South Burlington
13. South Burlington High School, South Burlington

Since the passage of passage of Act 125 and the inception of the Envision program, 9% of Vermont schools have been awarded a Certificate of Achievement. In addition, approximately 45% of schools have participated in an environmental health initiative on some level by identifying and addressing environmental health issues.

Envision Challenges and Opportunities

Developing a school environmental health program and subsequently achieving a Certificate requires school commitment and financial support. The Envision program and the Act 125 Advisory Panel continue to develop cost-effective state-wide initiatives that bring all schools one step closer to meeting the requirements for a Certificate of Achievement. One example is the 2007 passage of legislation on anti-idling on school grounds. Future statewide initiatives may include the use of green cleaning products, HEPA vacuum cleaners, and/or the use of integrated pest management practices in schools and on school grounds.

Another challenge is demonstrating that investments in school environmental health programs are cost-effective. The Envision program continues to examine ways to collect school health data before and after implementing an environmental health initiative to demonstrate its effectiveness. For example, one school was able to document decreased asthma episodes in schools following an environmental health initiative.

Appendix A

Vermont Department of Education

School Bus Idling Rule

New State Board of Education rule 6001 effective May 1, 2008.

Authorizing legislation: 23 V.S.A. § 1282(f) *Subject to state board of education rules, which may provide for limited idling, the operator of a school bus shall not idle the engine while waiting for children to board or to exit the vehicle at a school and shall not start the engine until ready to leave the school premises. The board, in consultation with the agency of natural resources, the department of health, and the department of motor vehicles, shall adopt rules to implement this subsection. The rules shall set forth periods or circumstances that reasonably require the idling of the engine, including periods when it is necessary to operate defrosting, heating, or cooling equipment to ensure the health or safety of the driver or passengers or to operate auxiliary equipment; and periods when the engine is undergoing maintenance or inspection. Effective Date: The rules required by this act shall take effect during the 2007–2008 academic year.*

6001 State Board of Education Rule #6001 School Bus Idling

6002 Statutory Authority: 23 V.S.A. § 1282(f)

6003 Statement of Purpose

It is the purpose of these rules to implement 23 V.S.A. §1282(f) by providing for the limited idling of school buses in specific circumstances.

6004 Definitions

The following definitions shall apply to these rules:

- a. “School Bus” includes all vehicles operated by or for the district for the purpose of transporting the district’s students to or from school or school-related activities, whether the vehicles are owned by the district or contracted from vendors.
- b. “School grounds” includes any area adjacent to school buildings and used at any time for school-related activities, including parking lots, playing fields, and driveways.
- c. “Idling” means the primary propulsion engine is running while the vehicle is stationary.

6005 Provisions

The district shall communicate this rule to all parents, drivers, and staff. The provisions of this rule shall be incorporated into transportation contracts and agreements.

The employer of a school bus driver shall ensure that the driver is informed of the rule and any related district policy, and that all complaints of non-compliance are reviewed and that appropriate corrective actions are taken.

The operator of a school bus:

- a. shall turn off the primary propulsion engine immediately upon arrival at student loading or unloading areas on school grounds, and shall not restart the engine until the bus is loaded or unloaded and is ready to depart; and
- b. shall not otherwise idle the bus engine for more than five (5) minutes in a sixty (60) minute period on school grounds.

The provisions of this rule shall not apply under the following conditions:

1. when the engine is required to operate special equipment for disabled persons;
2. when the engine is required to operate safety equipment other than lighting systems, such as windshield defrosters, and the operation of the equipment is necessary at that time to address specific safety, traffic, health, or emergency concerns; and
3. when the vehicle is being serviced and the operation of the engine is essential to the service being performed.

Appendix B



Appendix C

Requirements for Certificate of Achievement

*Environmental Health Policy
*Environmental Health Plan
*Non Toxic/Least Toxic Policy
*Integrated 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 for Certificate of Achievement**

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