

SUMMARY OF THE 2012 – 2013 ENVISION PARTICIPATION SURVEY



Poor indoor air quality in schools has been linked to decreased student and teacher performance, increased absenteeism, acute symptoms such as eye, nose and throat irritation, headache, nausea, and lethargy, and chronic conditions such as asthma and allergy.

In 2000 the Vermont legislature passed Act 125, charging state agencies to address indoor air quality and environmental health issues in school buildings. The “Envision – Promoting Healthy School Environments” program was born out of this legislation to provide a model environmental health management plan and guidance for schools.

Current levels of participation in the Envision Program are unknown because a sustained method of tracking school participation in the voluntary program was never instituted. A survey during the 2012 – 2013 school year was conducted to gauge school participation in the Program, and to characterize environmental health and indoor air quality efforts independent of the Envision Program. A total of 71 schools responded to the survey out of the 325 public schools in Vermont. Principals made up 77 percent of respondents, and facilities managers made up 14 percent of respondents.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: A total of 35 percent of survey respondents reported participating in any program that managed environmental health and indoor air quality. Of these schools, 21 percent reported participating in the Health Department’s Envision Program and 14 percent reported participating in another program. The two most commonly reported barriers to participation were a lack of awareness of such programs, and the real or perceived lack of funding available to support environmental health programs in their schools.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PLANS: Adoption of an environmental health management policy and plan by schools are two major points of focus and emphasis in the Envision Program. A total of 34 percent of survey respondents had achieved either or both of these goals.

Schools that reported adopting...	Percent (%) of Respondents	Number / Number of Respondents
An environmental health management policy	9	6 / 70
An environmental health management plan	24	17 / 70
Both an environmental health management policy and plan	1	1 / 70
Neither an environmental health management policy nor a plan	66	46 / 70

Survey responses indicated schools are not readily adopting policies and plans for environmental health and indoor air quality management.

POLICIES FOR SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS: While environmental health management policies and plans were relatively uncommon, some specific environmental health policies that were more readily implemented:

Schools that reported adopting...	Percent (%) of Respondents	Number / Number of Respondents
Least- / non-toxic purchasing policies for:		
Cleaning supplies	74	51 / 69
Maintenance	61	42 / 69
General school supplies	48	33 / 69
Art	42	29 / 69
Science*	30	21 / 69
Integrated pest management policy or program at the school	26	18 / 69
Anti-idling policy for all vehicles on school property	74	51 / 69

* Not all responding schools have science laboratories to which a least- / non-toxic purchasing policy would apply

PRACTICES THAT IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS: Practices and procedures have a strong effect on environmental health conditions in schools. Survey responses indicated that many best practices are used in Vermont schools, but not necessarily within the context of a school environmental health management program. Highlights from the survey:

Schools that reported...	Percent (%) of Respondents	Number / Number of Respondents
Regular heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) maintenance:		
Filter changes	98	65 / 66
Unit cleaning	88	58 / 66
Greasing / lubrication	70	46 / 66
Grille / diffuser cleaning	68	45 / 66
Performance testing / balancing	55	36 / 66
Using pest control strategies		
Exclusion of pests from the building	97	55 / 57
Limit pest access to food, water, harborage	93	52 / 56
Trapping	76	42 / 55
Baits, gels, or poison in bait boxes	28	14 / 50
Pesticide application on interior / exterior of building	29	14 / 48
Prohibiting teachers from furnishing their own cleaning products	26	18 / 69
Prohibiting warm-blooded animals in the classroom	62	43 / 69
Testing for radon and taking appropriate action, if necessary	45	31 / 69
Having an environmental health and indoor air quality team	36	24 / 66

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM NEEDS: Schools reported being interested in and learning more about environmental health and indoor air quality (specifically asthma and allergy trigger reduction, safety and physical hazards and HVAC maintenance), grant opportunities and building walkthroughs with Envision Program staff. This survey will assist the Envision Program in directing efforts to specific school needs and concerns.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS: The 2012 – 2013 Envision Participation Survey, which we hope to continue in the future either as part of the School Health Profile or independently, was successful in gauging the level of participation of Vermont schools in the Envision Program. Survey results also informed several future goals for Envision and environmental health in schools:

- From this survey, the Envision Program learned that schools are not readily adopting environmental health management policies and plans, and appropriate adjustments to this effort are needed.
- The Envision Program should encourage best practices that improve environmental health, even if it is outside the context of a formal environmental health management program at schools.
- Schools are not aware of the Envision Program possibly due to passing time, staff turn-over, or a lack of policies, and an effort to re-introduce this program to Vermont schools is necessary, perhaps within a larger coordinated school health effort.

A reporting method that can be used to track school progress with environmental health goals is needed, preferably within a larger integrated effort to engage schools with Health Department initiatives and goals.