

Position Paper #8: **School Facilities – Environmental Health**

Environmental concerns in the workplace, including schools and school grounds, have increased in recent years as school systems deal with the increase in environmentally related health problems. As part of this growing problem, schools have come under greater scrutiny, as parents and staffs have demanded proof of safe learning environments. This scrutiny has increased the need for accurate verifiable data to ensure public confidence. Concerns about these issues have been compounded in recent years due to limitations in available capital improvement funds from the State and the capacity of local governments to meet the match requirement. It has become increasingly difficult to renovate aging school facilities. Listed below are some of the issues local school systems now face:

1. Indoor Air Quality/Energy Conservation
2. Clean Air Act
3. Infectious and Communicable Diseases
4. Lead Abatement
5. Asbestos Abatement
6. Waste Management
7. Hazardous Waste/Hazardous Material Handling
8. Lighting
9. Pollution (Air, Water and Noise)
10. Chemical and Biological Substances
11. Spill Prevention Control and Counter Measures
12. Radiation and Radon
13. Underground Storage Tanks
14. PCBs/Carcinogens
15. Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)
16. Playground and Playground Equipment Safety
17. Drinking Water
18. Electrical Fields
19. Integrated Pest Management (Pesticides and Herbicides)

Many school systems are struggling to meet the ever-increasing requirements of environmental-related laws and regulations. Small school systems find that adding additional technical staff is fiscally impossible.

The cost associated with these matters does not occur in proportion to the local school system's ability to pay. Also, federal and state programs to help meet these needs are virtually non-existent. If districts are fortunate enough to procure funds for new construction, they have to be cognizant of a vast and growing set of legal requisites that add to the aggregate cost of construction and maintenance.

In addition, they must adhere to numerous record keeping requirements and inspection programs.

The Eastern Shore superintendents are in support of the following:

1. Environmentally safe learning environments that are conducive for learning for students and staff.
2. State and Federal support, both financial and technical, to adequately address environmental health mandates. Except for limited funds available through state and federal grants, the only money available to address school needs in the environmental health area are local funds, which are taken from educational programs.
3. State oversight that includes technical assistance and other support as opposed to punitive action.

Eastern Shore superintendents encourage the State to increase its technical support through the environmental services division of the local health department to help small school systems respond to emergencies and define long-range solutions to environmental and safety issues. The State should become a more significant (fiscal) partner as these strategies are implemented.

Furthermore, additional legislation must not be introduced and enacted that adds to these fiscal and human resource concerns unless funding is provided to assure adequate implementation.