

ALLIANCE ALERT

A Publication by the Alliance for Healthy Homes

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As Recalls Multiply, CPSC Claims It Will “Ban” Lead in Children’s Products

In mid-August, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) announced that it will “ban” lead in children’s products, including toys, jewelry, and lunch boxes. The CPSC’s pledge came in response to a series of high-profile toy recalls involving lead-based paint. After the announcement, Mattel, Inc., the world’s largest toy company, recalled nearly one million more toys because of the use of lead-based paint.

Lead in children’s products has been a problem for decades. Back in the 1990s, CPSC said that it was working with manufacturers to phase out the use of lead in toys, including the use of lead-based paint. However, the CPSC lead phase-out has been voluntary, and rules about lead in toys and other children’s products have been criticized as weak. At the present time, CPSC has no formal rule banning lead in children’s toys.

The spate of recalls over the summer and early fall months illustrates two problems. The first one is a trade problem, given that the United States has not taken a strict product safety position with countries that export children’s products to the U.S., especially China. All the toys involved in the summer and fall recalls were manufactured in China.

The second problem deals with CPSC itself. The agency has gone many months without a chairperson, and President Bush’s one nominee to the position, former National Association of Manufacturers executive Michael Baroody, was withdrawn due to his extreme anti-consumer safety positions. The lack of a chairperson also means that CPSC has been without its third commissioner and thus technically without quorum. Though Congress recently extended CPSC’s ability to operate without a quorum for another six months, understaffing at CPSC remains a chronic problem. On top of this, the Bush Administration has consistently underfunded CPSC.

To remedy these problems, Sen. Mark Pryor (D-AR) introduced S. 2045 in mid-September. Pryor’s bill would directly ban lead in all children’s products and would require testing of every toy import. The bill would also increase the number of CPSC commissioners to five, would permanently solve the quorum problem, and would provide more funding and staff.

For more information on S. 2045, visit <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:s.2045>. For more on lead in children’s products and the recent toy recalls, see http://centerforhealthyhousing.org/html/whats_new.htm.

FEMA Says Katrina Trailer Residents Can Now Move to Hotels

In a 180-degree turnabout, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) made public a new policy that will allow Hurricane Katrina evacuees to move their families to hotels and motels if the residents are concerned about levels of formaldehyde in their trailers.

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The policy shift will allow up to 60,000 families to move into safer temporary home environments than are found in the FEMA trailers. The decision came after a July Congressional hearing in which the agency was accused of neglecting the health and safety of trailer residents. Evidence showed that FEMA knew of dangerous concentrations of formaldehyde gas, a carcinogen, in the trailers but did nothing, even after one resident died of acute exposure to the poison. Instead, FEMA covered up the unhealthy conditions and sought ways to minimize its legal liability.

For more information on FEMA's missteps related to its trailers, see www.afhh.org/res/res_alert_archives_julaug07.htm#katrinatrailersformaldehyde. For information on the safe and healthy recovery from hurricanes and flood damage, see www.afhh.org/res/res_publications_hurricane_recovery_flood_damage_dl.htm.

Groups File Petition Urging EPA, CPSC to Regulate Air Fresheners

The Alliance for Healthy Homes, the National Center for Healthy Housing, the Sierra Club, and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) filed a petition in September urging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to more strictly regulate the chemicals in air fresheners sold throughout the country. The petition accompanied a recent NRDC study that found a variety of suspect chemicals in common air freshener products.

The groups noted in their petition that while air fresheners are billed as "safe," many contain dangerous chemicals, including benzene and formaldehyde, both of which are known human carcinogens and potent respiratory irritants. These and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) regularly escape air freshener products or are sprayed directly into the air, contaminating the home environment. VOCs can cause a variety of health problems, including asthma attacks, sore throat, and severe headache. VOCs can also build up to high concentrations in the home, because ultraviolet rays from the sun are not available to break the chemicals down, nor is there wind to disperse them.

Many of the air fresheners tested in the NRDC study were also found to contain phthalates, including those labeled "all natural." Phthalates are chemicals normally used to soften plastics and are suspected endocrine disruptors, meaning they may wreak havoc with human hormones and impact the thyroid. Due to their ability to mimic estrogen, phthalates may also disrupt the human reproductive system, and at least one study has implicated the chemicals in genital deformities in baby boys.

CPSC indicated in late September that it had received the petition and was "taking it seriously." At press time, EPA had not acknowledged that it received the petition.

To view the petition, visit www.afhh.org/res/res_pubs/airfreshenerspetitionfinal091907.pdf. To read the full text of the NRDC air freshener study, see www.nrdc.org/health/home/airfresheners/airfresheners.pdf. For more information on asthma, click to www.afhh.org/chil_ar/chil_ar_asthma.htm.

Senate Slightly Cuts Funding for Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control Program

On September 12, the U.S. Senate approved the Transportation-HUD appropriations bill for FY 2008. It included \$151 million for HUD's lead hazard control and healthy homes programs, including \$8.8 million for the Healthy Homes Initiative, \$48 million for the demonstration program (high-needs areas), and \$2 million for the "Big Buy" (paying for lead inspections of project-based, federally subsidized rental housing properties).

The House previously approved only \$130 million for FY 2008. The House and Senate bills will go to conference to be reconciled later. Even if the larger amount is ultimately approved, it will be slightly less than the FY 2007 appropriation of \$152 million.

For more information on these and all other FY 2008 appropriations bills, see <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/approp/app08.html>.

District of Columbia Seeks to Hold Landlords Accountable in Lead Paint Suits, Criminal Complaint

In mid-August, District of Columbia Attorney General Linda Singer filed a dozen lawsuits against rental property owners who failed to clean up lead-based paint hazards in their properties after being told to do so by the city. The hazards, already responsible for elevated blood lead levels of a number of DC children, continue to pose a risk to any child who lives in or visits the properties.

Since the filings began in June, Singer says that two landlords have cleaned up their properties and controlled the lead hazards there. However, she said that up to 20 additional landlords may be next on the list of those against whom the District will bring suits.

Lead hazards aren't the only health and housing problems that DC officials are tackling. In September, Singer slapped a DC property owner with a whopping 2,861 housing code violations for conditions that she described as "atrocious" and "unsafe in every way." The 22-unit building, in which the violations continue to occur, is riddled with rotted floors, caved-in ceilings, rampant rodent infestations, peeling lead paint, and, in one unit, a complete lack of bathroom facilities.

The owner, David Cormier, is alleged to have ignored these and other health and safety problems, despite repeated attempts by DC officials to get him to remedy the issues. Given the extreme nature of the ongoing code violations, the case against Cormier is a criminal one, rather than a civil suit.

For more information on promoting and securing decent and affordable housing, visit www.afhh.org/dah/dah_main.htm.

Rhode Island Proposes Massive Lead Abatement Project in Remedy Phase of Trial Against Former Lead Pigment Makers

Rhode Island Attorney General Patrick Lynch proposed a massive \$2.4 billion lead abatement plan in mid-September as the proposed remedy in the historic trial against former lead pigment manufacturers. The State prevailed against three paint companies in February 2006 when a jury found that the companies had contributed to a public nuisance in the manufacture and sale of a product the industry knew to be hazardous to human health.

Lynch said the state wants the companies to remove lead-based paint from more than half the homes in the state, more than 250,000 permanent and seasonal housing units. The abatement plan, which would be carried out over a four-year timeframe, would create an important precedent, and other states and companies are watching closely. The project could employ up to 10,000 workers.

The defendants in the case immediately asked Superior Court Judge Michael Silverstein to seal and then reject the clean up plan. The companies, which have never come forward voluntarily to assist federal, state, and local governments to rid homes of lead hazards created by their products, called the plan “ridiculous” and “unworkable.” They failed to acknowledge that the problem never would have existed had they not sold their dangerous products throughout most of the 20th century. The companies continue to blame property owners for the entire problem and complain that the Rhode Island plan would reward negligent landlords who have failed to clean up their properties.

For more information on government lawsuits against former lead pigment manufacturers, visit www.afhh.org/aa/aa_legal_remedies_lawsuits.htm.

Chicago Launches Public-Private Partnership to Protect Children from Lead

A new program to reduce childhood lead poisoning in Chicago will make more than \$12 million available to replace windows and address other lead hazards in approximately 2,000 affordable rental units or apartments over the next two years.

While lead poisoning in Chicago has fallen dramatically in recent years, Illinois leads the nation in the number of children identified as lead poisoned, and it is estimated that more than 81,000 children in Illinois are harmed by lead each year. Most children with elevated levels of lead in their blood are poisoned in their own homes when they ingest dust from deteriorating lead paint on windows, doors and porches. In Chicago alone, approximately 88,000 units of lead-contaminated housing are at risk for poisoning children.

The unique program combines a \$6 million grant from the City of Chicago Department of Public Health with \$6 million private capital raised by Delta Redevelopment Funds through federal New Market Tax Credits Program from lenders and investors including Fifth Third Bank, LaSalle Bank, Harris N.A., Cole Taylor Bank and The Private Bank. The City funds originated from HUD grants.

Qualifying landlords will be able to borrow the required funds for approved lead abatement work, but once half the loan plus interest has been paid back, the other half will be forgiven.

The program will be available to buildings with four or more units that offer affordable rents as defined by HUD. The building must also have a confirmed lead hazard, although it is not necessary to identify hazards before applying to the program.

Increased funding for lead abatement is just one of the many recommendations recently issued by the Lead Safe Housing Advisory Council, a legislatively established council which makes recommendation to the Governor and General Assembly on lead poisoning prevention programs. The Advisory Council is co-chaired by Anita Weinberg of Lead Safe Illinois and Loyola University of Chicago’s ChildLaw Center, and Gary Flentge of the Illinois Department of Public Health.

For more information on the program, visit www.leadSAFEillinois.org/cmsfiles/NMTCprograminfo.pdf.

New Papers Analyze How Housing and Health Interact

The Center for Housing Policy and Enterprise Community Partners have produced a series of papers that collect and analyze "available research evidence that frames the many ways in which our homes and the

neighborhoods where we live may affect health and educational outcomes. Some of these connections have been well-documented through years of rigorous study, while others need further examination."

- Housing and Health Research Summary:
www.nhc.org/pdf/chp_int_summary_hsglth0707.pdf
- Housing and Health Literature Review:
www.nhc.org/pdf/chp_int_litrvw_hsglth0707.pdf
- Housing and Health Annotated Bibliography:
www.nhc.org/pdf/chp_int_annbib_hsglth0707.pdf

- Housing and Education Research Summary:
www.nhc.org/pdf/chp_int_childfacts0707.pdf
- Housing and Education Literature Review:
www.nhc.org/pdf/chp_int_litrvw_hsgedu0707.pdf
- Housing and Education Annotated Bibliography:
www.nhc.org/pdf/chp_int_annbib_hsgedu0707.pdf

- Quick facts about how housing contributes to children's well-being:
www.nhc.org/pdf/chp_int_childfacts0707.pdf

- Outline of promising hypotheses on how decent, stable, and affordable housing may contribute to health and education outcomes:
www.nhc.org/pdf/chp_int_facts0707.pdf

For more information on the papers, contact Center for Housing Policy Communications Director Michele Anapol at manapol@nhc.org.

Brown University Study Links Mold and Excessive Dampness with Depression

Setting out to debunk several studies from the United Kingdom that linked household mold with depression, a Brown University epidemiologist and his colleagues conducted research in the United States. The scientists admit that the results surprised them—they found a significant association between mold and excessive dampness in the home and depression.

The researchers warned that their study does not prove that mold and excessive moisture *cause* depression. However, the two conditions are linked by a strong enough association to warrant attention, the study says. The scientists theorize that two factors may link mold and excessive moisture with depression. First, those living in homes where mold growth is rampant may feel a lack of control over their living environment. Second, health effects of mold, including wheezing, coughing, fatigue, and worsened asthma symptoms, may cause some residents to become depressed.

The researchers are now conducting additional research, looking to see if mold exposure does, in fact, cause depression.

For more information on the study, visit www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/2007-08/07-023.html. For more on the health effects of mold and excessive moisture, see www.afhh.org/hah/hah_health_issue_NAS_fact_sheet.htm. For information on how to combat mold and moisture in the home, visit www.afhh.org/dah/dah_mold.htm.

HUD Announces FY07 Lead and Healthy Homes Grantees

In early September, HUD awarded nearly \$143 million in grants to dozens of state and local communities, public health organizations, and scientific research institutions to help protect children and families from dangerous lead-based paint and other home health and safety hazards. The funding announced today is expected to reduce or eliminate lead exposure in more than 10,500 homes nationally and reduce levels of allergy-inducing substances in more than 780 homes.

HUD awarded the grants to 65 local programs located in 23 states. For a summary of all the grant projects, visit www.hud.gov/news/releases/projects/summaries07.pdf.

Alliance Continues Healthy Rebuilding Training on Mississippi Gulf Coast

On October 25 and 26, the Alliance for Healthy Homes and the Mississippi Interfaith Disaster Task Force will sponsor two workshops to teach techniques for affordable, healthy, and safe rebuilding of hurricane-damaged homes, including strategies for making rebuilt homes more wind-resistant, better able to survive water intrusion, and more energy efficient. Principal trainer Dennis Livingston has more than 25 years of experience designing and delivering worker training in renovation, weatherization, and remediation of lead hazards, and other healthy housing practices. The workshops are funded in part by the Home Depot Foundation.

One workshop will be offered on Thursday, October 25, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. for case managers who provide assistance to homeowners working to rebuild. Another workshop on Friday, October 26, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., is designed for contractors, housing developers, maintenance staff, volunteers, and others who actually do work on homes.

The workshops will be held at DeMiller Hall, Church of the Redeemer, 610 Water Street, Biloxi, MS. To register or for more information, please call or e-mail Farlene Bowman, Mississippi Interfaith Disaster Task Force, at 228-432-9310 or farlene@msidtf.org.

Angie's List Hits the Road with 20 City Lead Awareness Tour

Indianapolis-based Angie's List, the national consumer organization that helps homeowners find painters, remodelers and many other types of service providers, will be taking a lead safety show on the road to twenty cities, including Indianapolis, in September and October.

Inspired by Improving Kids Environment's (IKE) Secret Shopper program, which tested the advice given to homeowners by hardware and paint stores, Angie's List contacted nearly 200 remodelers, painters and other companies whose work disturbs paint. In response to first general, then specific, questions about the risks of lead-based paint, nearly one-third of the companies gave dangerous advice. These results spurred the company to offer free Lead-Safe Work Practices training to contractors as well as advice to homeowners.

Angie's List will be partnering with local health departments and other groups in each city to provide the training, blood lead testing for children and lead testing for toys and other products. More information about the tour is available at <http://leadsafety.angieslist.com/>.

October 21-27 Is National Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Week

Continuing a decade-old practice, Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Susan Collins (R-ME) are asking their U.S. Senate colleagues sign a resolution declaring the last full week in October National Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Week. State and local governments, policymakers, and lead poisoning prevention advocates can help highlight successes, call attention to challenges that still remain, and advance primary prevention. Examples of past events from across the country and sample outreach and education materials are available on the Alliance's website at www.afhh.org/res/res_by_topic_lead_outreach_education.htm. Additional activities and resources are suggested at www.montana.edu/wwwcxair/October_Lead.htm.

Upcoming Conferences

EPA is hosting a free Pesticide Worker Safety and Health Conference, October 2-4, in Arlington, VA. The conference will provide information to federal and state agencies and private sector organizations involved in pesticide worker safety and health programs, policies, and research initiatives and highlight the accomplishments of the Agency's worker protection initiatives in partnership. To preregister for the conference and obtain the draft agenda, visit www.epameetings.com/meeting_details.cfm?meetid=19.

Enterprise Community Partners and the Alliance for Healthy Homes are sponsoring a webinar on protecting residents from radon on Thursday, October 4, 2007, at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time. The live online event, titled "Radon - Protecting Occupants is Easier than You May Think," will explore how housing and community development organizations, other developers and builders, and housing agencies can protect the occupants of homes that they build and rehab by testing for radon, fixing homes that have high levels of radon, and using radon-resistant new construction design, a core element of effective green building design. For more information, visit www.enterprisecommunity.org/training_and_events/live_online_events/.

The Lead and Environmental Hazards Association's National Mid-Year Conference on Eliminating Childhood Lead Poisoning, Implementing Healthy Homes Programs, and Combating Indoor Environmental Hazards will be held October 4-5 in Philadelphia. This is an educational and networking conference for public officials, program administrators, lead industry practitioners, environmental consultants and contractors, facility operators, health educators and community advocates. For more information, visit www.leadmoldconferences.com/events/ or call 1-800-590-6522.

The Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit of Region 3 and the Mid-Atlantic Center for Children's Health and the Environment will hold the 5th Annual Conference on Children's Health and the Environment on October 6 in Reston, VA. The conference is targeted to health care providers, public health professionals, and the general public. Topics will explore the intersection between the environment and child health. For more information, see www.gwu.edu/~macche/restonconference07/ or call 1-866-MACCHE1.

North Carolina's 9th Annual Community-Based Environmental Justice Summit will be held October 19-20 at the Historic Franklinton Center at Bricks, Edgecombe County, NC. Community members, government officials, environmentalists, students, and researchers will participate. The Summit seeks to raise public awareness about environmental justice; connect communities in need with technical resources; support and encourage community-driven research; help communities and policy makers address problems of environmental injustice; and bring about positive changes in public health and the

environment by promoting social and environmental justice. For more information, contact Steve Wing at steve_wing@unc.edu.

The 2007 Indiana Lead Safe and Healthy Homes Conference will be held October 29-30 in Indianapolis. The program includes sessions on asthma and best practices for healthy childcare. Key speakers include State Health Commissioner Judy Monroe, MD; Daniel Symonik of the Minnesota Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program; and Michael McGeehin of the CDC. Visit www.ikecoalition.org for more information.

Registration is now open for the November 6, 2007, workshop, "Wise Ways to Get the Integrated Pest Management Service You Want." At this one-day workshop, you'll learn how to hire and work with a structural pest management provider to get the kind of service that will help you reduce both pest complaints and pesticide use. The workshop will be held 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Nile Hall, Preservation Park, Oakland, CA. The workshop leader is Dr. Albert Greene of the federal General Services Administration, who has more than 20 years experience implementing integrated pest management at public agencies. To register, visit www.ecowisecertified.org/workshop.

The National Conference on Legal Remedies: How States, Municipalities and Public Interest Groups Can Combat Childhood Lead Poisoning through Legislation, Litigation and Regulatory Enforcement will be held November 29-30 in Baltimore, MD. The conference is structured around a combination of plenary sessions and breakout sessions. In the plenary sessions, various subject areas will be introduced and information on the subjects presented. Each subject area will then be addressed in greater detail in a breakout session, giving attendees the opportunity to further explore how to pursue that particular remedy. For more information, see www.leadmoldconferences.com/events/.