EPA Region 6—South Central

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Issue 12

Helping Kids Learn in a Pollution Free Environment

January Is National Radon Action Month

Chances are you've already heard of radon - a radioactive gas that can cause lung cancer. But what you might not have heard is that high levels have been found in a number of schools across the country. Therefore, it is important that students, teachers and parents be aware that a potential problem could exist in their school.

A nationwide survey of radon levels in schools estimates that nearly one in five has at least one schoolroom with a short -term radon level above the action level of 4 pCi/L (picoCuries per liter) - the level at which EPA recommends that schools take action to reduce the level. EPA estimates that more than 70,000 schoolrooms in use today have high short -term radon levels.

The only way to determine if a problem exists is to test for it. Having your school tested for radon is something you may want to discuss with your school officials. Because as real as the threat of radon is, the good news is that the problem can be solved.

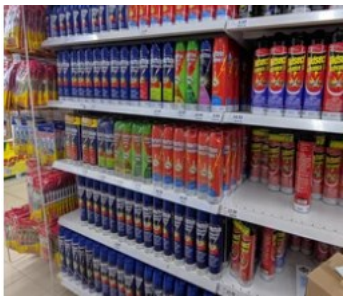
The EPA ranks indoor radon among the most serious environmental health problems facing us today. After smoking, it is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States causing an estimated twenty one thousand (21,000) lung cancer deaths a year.

Radon is a naturally occurring gas that seeps into buildings from the surrounding soil. In some cases, well water may be a source of radon. You can't see, taste, or smell radon. In fact, the only way to discover if high levels of radon are present is through testing. Learn more at https://www.epa.gov/radon/radon-schools.

February Is National Pesticide Safety Education Month

During the month of February, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) celebrates National Pesticide Safety Education Month to raise awareness for pesticide safety education and share best practices for using pesticides safely in and around your home. Reading the label every time you use a pesticide is key to ensuring you are using the pesticide correctly and keeping yourself and your family safe. EPA assesses the risks and benefits of all pesticides sold and distributed in the United States and requires instructions on each pesticide label for how to use the pesticide safe. Here are more tips to follow for all pesticides:

- Store pesticides in their original containers with proper labels.
- Store pesticides out of the reach of children and pets, preferably locked up.
- Use the amount specified on the label. Using more will not be more effective and may harm you, your loved ones and the environment.
- Wash hands with soap and water after using a pesticide. Wash clothes that have been in contact with pesticides immediately and separately from other items.
- Don’t let children and pets enter sprayed areas while they are still wet.
- Keep pesticides away from food and dishes.
- Learn more at https://www.epa.gov/ipm/epas-approach-integrated-pest-management-schools.



Learning Links—What Is EJScreen and What Can It Tell You?

EJScreen allows users to access high-resolution environmental and demographic information for locations in the United States, and compare their selected locations to the rest of the state, EPA region, or the nation.

The tool may help users identify areas with people of color and/or low-income populations, potential environmental quality issues, a combination of environmental and demographic indicators that is greater than usual, and other factors that may be of interest. EJScreen may also be used to support educational programs, grant writing, community awareness efforts, and other purposes.

This screening tool and data may be of interest to community residents or other stakeholders as they search for environmental or demographic information. It can also support a wide range of research and policy goals. The public has used EJScreen in many different locations and in many different ways.

Launch the EJScreen Tool

EPA is sharing EJScreen with the public to be more transparent about how we consider environmental justice in our work, to assist our stakeholders in making informed decisions about pursuing environmental justice, and to create a common starting point between the agency and the public when looking at issues related to environmental justice.

Screening tools should be used for a "screening-level" look. Screening is a useful first step in understanding or highlighting locations that may be candidates for further review. However, it is essential to remember that screening-level results do not, by themselves, determine the existence or absence of environmental justice concerns in a given location, they do not provide a risk assessment, and have other significant limitations.

Notes for Nurses—Air Quality Flag Program

Here's how the Air Quality Flag Program works: each day your organization raises a flag that corresponds to how clean or polluted the air is. The color of the flag matches EPA's Air Quality Index (AQI): green, yellow, orange, red, and purple. On unhealthy days, your organization can use this information to adjust physical activities to help reduce exposure to air pollution, while still keeping people active. Learn more at https://www.airnow.gov/air-quality-flag-program/schools/.

Custodian's Closet— Air Quality Tools for Schools—Preventative Maintenance

Focusing on IAQ management in your preventive maintenance activities will help to ensure healthy indoor environments in schools. Poor IAQ can cause health problems, such as respiratory irritation, sore throats, asthma attacks, drowsiness and headaches; it also can make it hard to concentrate. The scientific evidence continues to mount, demonstrating that when student and staff health is impacted, learning and performance also are affected. A successful preventive maintenance program addresses the causes of poor IAQ and also can minimize pollutants in the air children and staff breathe in schools, ensure adequate ventilation and increase efficiency of building operations, therefore saving energy and costs.

However, if you do not pay careful attention to how energy management and IAQ affect each other, student and staff health and performance can suffer. If not performed correctly, energy management activities can create dust; disturb hazardous materials, such as asbestos, lead and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs); bring new contaminants into the HVAC system or create new places for them to enter; create or increase moisture problems; and result in inadequate ventilation in occupied spaces. Ignoring these issues can cause IAQ problems that lead to expensive repairs.

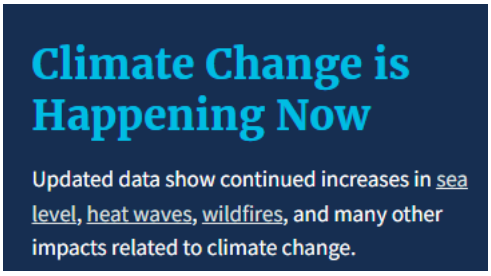
What Is Climate Change and What Are the Indicators of Climate Change?

The Earth's climate is changing. Temperatures are rising, snow and rainfall patterns are shifting, and more extreme climate events – like heavy rainstorms and record high temperatures – are already happening. Many of these observed changes are linked to the rising levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in our atmosphere, caused by human activities.

EPA partners with more than 50 data contributors from various government agencies, academic institutions, and other organizations to compile a key set of indicators related to the causes and effects of climate change. These indicators also provide important input to the National Climate Assessment and other efforts to understand and track the science and impacts of climate change. Explore the indicators below. Learn more about EPA's indicators.

All of the indicators on the EPA website relate to either the causes or the effects of climate change. Some indicators show trends that can be more directly linked to human-induced climate change than others. Collectively, the trends depicted in these indicators provide important evidence of "what climate change looks like."

Although each indicator has a connection to climate change, EPA's indicators do not attempt to identify either the extent to which a certain indicator is driving climate change or the relative role of climate change in causing a trend in an observed indicator. Connections between human activities, climate change, and observed indicators are explored in more detail in the scientific literature.



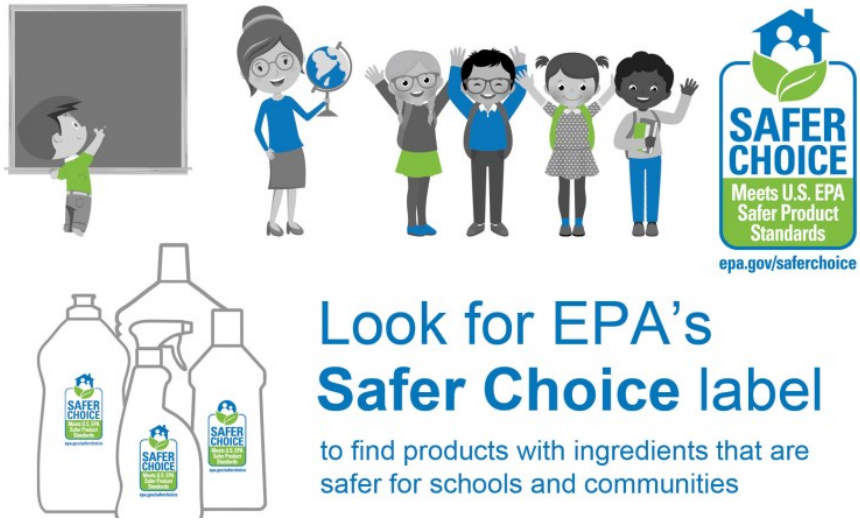
What Is the Idle-free Schools Toolkit?

The Idle-Free Schools Toolkit includes information needed to run an effective idling reduction campaign at a school to reduce student exposure to toxic vehicle exhaust. The Toolkit also provides the resources to make this a student-run science or community involvement project, providing students with the opportunity to learn how to run a public service campaign while expanding their science and math skills.

Idling vehicles contribute to air pollution and emit **air toxins**, which are pollutants known or suspected to cause cancer or other serious health effects. Monitoring at schools has shown elevated levels of benzene, formaldehyde, acetaldehyde and other air toxics during the afternoon hour coinciding with parents **picking up their children**. Children's lungs are still developing, and when they are exposed to elevated levels of these pollutants, children have an increased risk of developing asthma, respiratory problems and other adverse health effects. Limiting a vehicle's idling time can dramatically reduce these pollutants and children's exposure to them.

The Idle-Free Schools Toolkit includes everything a school needs to institute this simple, yet vital and effective idling reduction campaign. Schools can use all of the materials and follow the recommended schedule as written or can implement an idling reduction campaign of their own, using the materials that fit with the school's desires and capabilities. To learn more about the tools available, visit https://www.epa.gov/schools/idle-free-schools-toolkit-healthy-school-environment.

What Is Safer Choice?



EPA's **Safer Choice** label

Products that carry the Safer Choice label have been carefully evaluated by EPA scientists to ensure they contain ingredients that are safer for human health and the environment.

Safer Choice-labeled products must:

- Contain safer ingredients
- Work
- Disclose all ingredients
- Meet packaging requirements

The Safer Choice label helps you find products made with ingredients that are safer for our families, pets, communities, and the environment.

Find Safer Choice-labeled products!
epa.gov/saferchoice/products

For more information, contact:
saferchoice@epa.gov

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law: Transforming U.S. Recycling and Waste Management

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is an historic investment in the health, equity, and resilience of American communities. With unprecedented funding to support state and local waste management infrastructure and recycling programs, EPA will improve health and safety and help establish and increase recycling programs nationwide.

The United Nations International Resource Panel concluded that natural resource extraction and processing make up about half of all global greenhouse gas emissions. Increasing recycling reduces climate, environmental, and social impacts of materials extraction and keeps valuable resources in use, instead of in landfills.

Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, EPA is developing three new waste prevention, reuse, and recycling programs:

Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling Grant Program.

Recycling Education and Outreach Grant Program.

Battery Collection Best Practices and Voluntary Battery Labeling Guidelines.

While not all of these opportunities may be open to schools, there may be opportunities to partner with other state and sub-state agencies for available funds.

Application Requirements and Forms for the Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators and the Presidential Environmental Youth Awards

The Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators recognizes outstanding kindergarten through grade 12 teachers who employ innovative approaches to environmental education and use the environment as a context for learning for their students. Up to two teachers from each of EPA's 10 regions, from different states, will be selected to receive this award. The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers this award to honor, support and encourage educators who incorporate environmental education into their classrooms and teaching methods.

The President's Environmental Youth Award (PEYA) recognizes outstanding environmental stewardship projects developed by K-12 youth. The PEYA program promotes awareness of our nation's natural resources and encourages positive community involvement. Since 1971, the President of the United States has joined with EPA to recognize young people for protecting our nation's air, water, land, and ecology. It is one of the most important ways EPA and the Administration demonstrate commitment to environmental stewardship efforts created and conducted by our nation's youth.

Each year the PEYA program honors a wide variety of projects developed by young students, school classes and clubs, youth camps, and youth organizations to promote environmental awareness and action in schools and communities. Thousands of young people from all 50 states and the U.S. territories have submitted projects to EPA for consideration. Winning projects in the past have demonstrated impact in schools and communities in a wide range of subject areas. Participation in the PEYA program is frequently a life-changing experience for many of the young people and their project sponsors education in their classrooms and teaching methods.

For more information on the Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators and the Presidential Environmental Youth Awards, find more information at .www.epa.gov. Specific links to those pages can be found by following the hyperlinks under the pictures below.

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Protecting human health and the environment.

United States Environmental Protection Agency

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ODDS AND ENDS

Upcoming Newsletters

In our next issue, the Region 6 Healthy Schools Newsletter in March 2023,will highlight the following:

- National Groundwater Awareness Week and Drinking Water Week
- Air Quality Awareness and Clean Air and Asthma Awareness Weeks
- Earth Day and Food Waste Recovery Month

Contacts

in addition to the quarterly columns on Notes for Nurses, Custodian's Closet, and Learning Links. Healthy Schools is published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 6 - South Central in Dallas, Texas. Region 6 includes the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas as well as 66 Tribes. For general information about Healthy Schools, to provide feedback on this newsletter, or to be added or removed from the distribution list, please contact Cathy Gilmore, Senior Environmental Employee (SEE) for Healthy Schools at Gilmore.cathy@epa.gov

Feedback

We would love your Feedback on this newsletter or suggestions for future topics. Please email EPA at Gilmore.cathy@epa.gov.

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