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Please Designate the Alliance in Your Donation to the Combined Federal Campaign!

The Alliance for Healthy Homes participates in the Combined Federal Campaign, which allows employees of the federal government to donate to nonprofit charities through automatic payroll contributions.

The Alliance's Combined Federal Campaign identification number is 10367. Many thanks to all who contribute!

Healthy Housing Council Bill Introduced

Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) and Senator Mike Johanns (R-NE) introduced S.1658, the Healthy Housing Council Act of 2009 on September 10th, which would bring together federal, state, and local government representatives, as well as industry and nonprofit leaders, to examine the most effective ways to make America's housing healthier. It is similar to a bill introduced by Sen. Reed in the previous congress and reported on in the [March-April 2008 Alert](#).

The bill would authorize \$750,000 for each of the next five years for the Council to review, monitor, and evaluate existing housing, health, energy, and environmental programs and to make recommendations for reducing duplication, ensuring collaboration, identifying best practices, and developing a comprehensive healthy housing research agenda. The Council would submit an annual report to Congress outlining agency actions on healthy housing, as well as research, policy/program, and funding recommendations.

Members of the Council would include the agency heads of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Departments of Energy, Veterans Affairs, Treasury, Agriculture, Education, and Labor. Six members of the Council would represent state or local agencies, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit industries.

Senators Boxer (D-CA), Merkley (D-OR), and Franken (D-MN) joined as original co-sponsors of the bill. The full bill is available at http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_bills&docid=f:s1658is.txt.pdf.

Senators Introduce Bill to Protect Consumers from Formaldehyde in Composite Wood Products

On September 11, U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar (D, MN) and Mike Crapo (R, ID) introduced legislation to establish national health standards for formaldehyde

in composite wood products. The bill would cover both domestic products and foreign imports. With broad support from the wood products industry as well as environmental, health and labor organizations, it is widely expected to be enacted without significant controversy.

The standards would match those recently adopted by the California Air Resources Board that are being phased in over a three-year period. Broad support is expected for the bill because it favors domestic manufacturers that are preparing to comply with the California standard as they compete with a flood of cheaper imported products with high formaldehyde emissions, primarily from China. "This legislation is pro-industry, pro-consumer, pro-environment and pro-public health. Its passage will be a legislative grand slam," noted Sen. Klobuchar in a press release.

Formaldehyde is used in many products as an adhesive, bonding agent or solvent. Most composite wood (made from wood pieces, particles or fibers bonded together with resin) contains some formaldehyde. Composite wood is used in common household products such as furniture, cabinets, shelving, countertops, flooring and molding. At room temperature, formaldehyde releases an invisible gas into the air. If breathed in at high concentrations, it can pose a health hazard. It can cause nausea, burning sensations in the eyes and throat, and difficulty breathing for some people. Formaldehyde is listed as a "probable human carcinogen" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The Formaldehyde Standards for Composite Wood Act would establish national emission standards under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) for formaldehyde in new composite wood products. Secondhand products and antiques are exempted. Under the bill, by January 1, 2012, these products sold in the U.S. would have to meet a formaldehyde emission standards of about 0.09 parts per million. Collectively, these would be the toughest standards in the world. The bill would also require third-party testing and certification to ensure compliance and direct the EPA to work with Customs and Border Protection and other relevant federal agencies to enforce the standards for imports.

The bill's text is available at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:S.1660>:

British Lead Study Adds Support to Lowering Lead Level of Concern

A recent study published in the British journal *Archives of Diseases in Childhood* reports on the findings of a longitudinal study examining the impact of lead exposure at 30 months of age and educational success and hyperactivity in 488 children. The study found that children with blood lead levels between five and ten micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$) had lower school test scores at ages 7 and 8. Additionally, it found that children with a blood lead level over 10 had increased scores for hyperactivity and anti-social behavior.

The study adds to a large body of evidence demonstrating the ill effects of lead at levels under the CDC's 1991 level of concern. The Alliance agrees with the study authors when they wrote, "Early childhood exposure to lead affects later educational attainment and behaviour even at low blood levels (5-10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$), and the level of concern should be lowered to 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$."

Click here for the full article, "[Effects of early childhood lead exposure on academic performance and behaviour of school age children](#)." For more information, see the [September 16th BBC article](#).



First “Formaldehyde Trailer” Lawsuit Starts and Ends in Defeat for Plaintiffs

Nearly 4 years after Hurricane Katrina sent tens of thousands of families to live in government-issued trailers, a lawsuit filed by a New Orleans mother and her son began in mid-September and ended in federal court 10 days later. On September 24, the jury rejected the claim by plaintiffs that the son’s asthma was worsened by high levels of formaldehyde in their trailer manufactured by Gulf Stream and provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The jury held that the government-issued trailer was not “unreasonably dangerous” in its construction. One juror reportedly said that the plaintiffs’ attorneys never had the “smoking gun” that proved their case. The jury also concluded that Fluor Enterprises, who held the contract with FEMA to install the trailers, wasn’t negligent. No federal agency was named as a defendant in this case, but federal agencies have been sued in hundreds of other cases regarding formaldehyde exposure in FEMA trailers.



Source: 2theadvocate.com

Plaintiffs’ attorney argued that Gulf Stream made an “unreasonably dangerous” trailer and Fluor compounded the formaldehyde risks by improperly installing it. Gulf Stream’s own tests found elevated levels of formaldehyde in its trailers in early 2006, but the company allegedly failed to warn plaintiffs about the potential risks. Gulf Stream lawyers urged jurors to consider different standards for what could be safe levels of formaldehyde, a chemical commonly found in construction materials that can cause breathing problems and is classified as a carcinogen. An attorney for the defendants told jurors that formaldehyde is found in safe levels in many products, including cosmetics, foods and shampoo, and he downplayed the link between formaldehyde and cancer, saying only one scientific group has classified the chemical as a carcinogen.

It was unclear how the verdict could affect other cases, but sometimes verdicts in “bellwether trials” can influence parties toward a mass settlement of similar claims. However, lawyers typically wait for several cases to be tried before concluding whether a class of cases has legal merit. Before trial started, U.S. District Judge Kurt Engelhardt ruled that a two-year statute of limitations barred the plaintiffs’ claims against the government. An issue that may play out differently in other suits is whether a jury would reach a different verdict if the government were a defendant, too. Government tests on hundreds of trailers in Louisiana and Mississippi found formaldehyde levels that were, on average, about five times what people are exposed to in most modern homes. FEMA downplayed formaldehyde risks for months before those test results were announced in February 2008.

EPA Considers Small Fixes to RRP Rule Requested by Advocates & Industry

The US EPA has agreed to propose clarifications to the Renovation, Repair, and Painting (RRP) rule. These changes will supplement the changes anticipated under the recent settlement between the EPA and public interest petitioners over shortcomings in the RRP rule (see the [August Alert](#)). The changes were requested by The Alliance, the National Center for Healthy Housing, and the National Association of Home Builders. In a September 23 letter, EPA agreed to propose several of the requested changes.

Amongst the more significant changes, EPA agreed to request comment on the training requirements for principal instructors teaching the Renovator course. Currently, EPA requires principal instructors to have completed 16 hours of accredited lead-specific training. This training requirement can be met through existing lead abatement worker, risk assessment, or inspection classes. The Alliance and other proponents of the change believe that this requirement is unnecessary since the skills taught in such classes do not prepare one to teach lead safe renovation, and as a result, this requirement creates a significant barrier to recruiting the number of trainers needed to successfully implement the rule.

EPA also agreed to propose clear language for allowing online and other alternative delivery methods for the

“lecture” portion of classes (in person hands-on activities would still be required). EPA will also clarify that the dangerous practices are prohibited or restricted for all jobs that disturb paint (excluding only paint known not to be leaded as opposed to only on jobs that involve lead-based paint), and clarify that information relevant to lead-safe renovation must be taught on the job to non-certified workers. These fixes will not make a substantial difference in the requirements – rather they make the legal language more understandable.

For more information, see our [original letter to EPA](#) and their [response](#).

WHO Releases New Radon Handbook

The World Health Organization (WHO) is strengthening their recommendations to protect against indoor radon, the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. The new WHO Handbook on Indoor Radon: A Public Health Perspective, was released September 21st, and can be accessed from WHO’s website at http://www.who.int/ionizing_radiation/env/radon/en/index1.html.

WHO recommends lowering radon gas levels by one-third below the current U.S. guidance, or a threshold of action of 2.7 picocuries per liter (pCi/L), a measure of radioactivity. The new threshold contrasts with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) level of 4 pCi/L, an action level that has been in place for 40 years. The lower WHO action level also doubles the number of U.S. homes needing radon control systems from 8 million to 15 million.

In addition to testing, the WHO handbook notes that indoor radon is the result of the way we design and build homes. Thus, WHO places clear responsibility for radon exposure on architects, builders, and real estate professionals and urges radon control systems in new homes and testing homes before sale.

Levels can be lowered through very effective yet relatively inexpensive techniques such as sealing cracks in floors and walls and increasing the ventilation rate of the building.

Visit the [Alliance’s website](#) for more information on Radon. Additional information on the release of the new Handbook can be found at www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS107486+21-Sep-2009+PRN20090921.

800 Federally Assisted Units to be Made Lead Safe in Settlement with NYC Landlords

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has announced an agreement with a New York City property management company and 20 affiliated owners of federally assisted multifamily properties in Brooklyn. The owners agreed to pay a \$20,000 penalty for failing to provide information regarding lead hazard reduction work at the properties and to clean up lead-based paint hazards in nearly 800 apartments.

The agreement represents the first administrative settlement for violations of the Federal [Lead Safe Housing Rule](#). According to HUD, Star Realty Company and the property owners failed to provide information to HUD regarding the operation and condition of the 20 multifamily properties.

Under the settlement, the companies must come into compliance with the Lead Safe Housing Rule by conducting lead-based paint risk assessments; providing notification of testing and lead work to tenants; performing lead-based paint hazard reduction work; conducting clearance examinations; and performing ongoing operations and maintenance.

The landlords agreed to perform lead-based paint hazard reduction work in 17 properties containing 639 units. Three other properties with an additional 149 units were brought into compliance prior to settlement of this action. For more information, see [HUD’s press release](#).

NCHH Releases State of Healthy Housing Report

The National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) has released a new study which ranks housing conditions in 45 major metropolitan areas across the nation. The [State of Healthy Housing](#) reveals a critical need to improve housing conditions, which will have a direct impact on the health of residents. The ultimate goal of the report is to increase awareness of housing-related health hazards and to provide the basis for additional investment in affordable, healthy housing.



The NCHH study uses survey data from the American Housing Survey (AHS), which is collected by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. NCHH selected 20 key housing factors from AHS that are related to health.

According to the study, the most common housing problems in U.S. housing are water leaks from the outside (11%) and inside (8%), roofing problems (6%), damaged interior walls (5%) and signs of mice (5%). Water intrusion and roof problems contribute to damp home environments, which have been linked to asthma and other respiratory problems. Hazards such as damaged walls present a lead poisoning threat in homes built before 1978. Mice have been implicated in both the development and worsening of asthma.

Charlotte, North Carolina, Anaheim-Santa Ana, California, and Atlanta, Georgia, rank at the top of the list for having the healthiest housing. The metropolitan areas of San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles, California, and New York City ranked as having the least healthy housing.

For more information, read the article in [USA Today](#) or visit the [NCHH website](#).

Reducing Blood Lead Levels has Significant Social Benefits

In a research article that appeared in the September 2009 issue of Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, author Peter Muennig estimates the social benefits that might be realized if all children in the United States had a blood lead level of less than 1 µg/dL.

Meunnig concludes that by reducing blood lead levels to less than 1 µg/dL among all US children between birth and age 6 years would reduce crime and increase on-time high school graduation rates later in life. The net societal benefits arising from these improvements in high school graduation rates and reductions in crime would amount to \$50,000 per child annually at a discount rate of 3%. This would result in overall savings of approximately \$1.2 trillion and produce an additional 4.8 million quality-adjusted life years for US society as a whole.

Studies like this and like the [national cost-benefit analysis of lead hazard control we wrote about in July](#) give strong evidence that more aggressive programs aimed at reducing childhood lead exposure may produce large social benefits.

The abstract of the article is available at: <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/163/9/844?etoc> (however, you need to subscribe or pay a per-article fee to access the full article).

Recent Research Findings in Healthy Housing

MRI Images Suggest Childhood Lead Exposure Linked to Faulty Brain Wiring

A new [research study](#) published in *NeuroToxicology* concludes that childhood lead exposure can result in abnormalities in the wiring of the brain that persist into adulthood. The study found that low to moderate levels of lead exposure before birth and as a child can permanently change the brain's structure and alter if and how it transmits messages. The conclusions are based upon comparisons of images of the brain's nerves and their protective coverings or "white matter" that forms while the child is still in the womb and finishes forming during the early years of life when the brain is most sensitive to the effects of lead. Greater white matter changes were seen in children who had larger exposure to lead as children. Those exposures ranged from about 5 to 37 ug/dL of blood, with most falling between 5 and 10.

The 91 participants - who ranged in age from 20 to 25 years old - were part of the Cincinnati Lead Study and had been followed since before birth for lead exposure. The changes seen were present in young adults studied, showing the effects of childhood lead exposure are not something that will just get better with time.

Research Links Lead and Heart Disease

Exposure to lead over a lifetime may increase the risk of dying from heart disease, [new research shows](#). Researchers analyzed lead concentrations in the blood and bones of 868 mostly white men from the Boston area who participated in the Normative Aging Study.

The authors found bone lead to be associated with all-cause and cardiovascular mortality in an environmentally exposed population with low blood lead levels. This study suggests that cumulative lead exposure from prior decades of high environmental exposures continues to significantly affect risk of death despite recent declines in environmental lead exposure. Researchers said the link to cardiovascular disease underscores the need for regulatory bodies and surveillance agencies to track potential sources of lead exposure.

For more information, see the article in [US News and World Report](#).

Upcoming Events

The Northwest Children's Environmental Health Forum will be held October 1-2, 2009 in Tukwila, Washington. You are invited to attend this two-day event that will bring together policy makers, professionals, K-12 educators, academic researchers, individuals and others to showcase new research, current science and effective programs. The Forum is Organized by the Children's Environmental Health Working group of the Collaborative on Health and the Environment – Northwest. For more information, visit www.chenw.org/CEHforum.html.

The National Mid-Year Conference on Eliminating Childhood Lead Poisoning, Implementing Healthy Homes Programs and Combating Indoor Environmental Hazards will be held October 15-16, 2009 in Philadelphia, PA. The conference brings together professionals from health, housing, community development, community groups, advocacy organizations, the lead industry, real estate firms, and residential and commercial facilities to explore the ways to undertake programs and projects designed to prevent incidents of lead poisoning and eliminate indoor environmental hazards. For more information, visit <http://www.leadmoldconferences.com/website/>.

A Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes Conference will be taking place Thursday, October 22, 2009 in Wheaton, IL. The conference will be held at the DuPage County Administration Building, from 9am – 3:30pm. This conference is held to assist environmental professionals, renovation contractors, and home property managers in identifying home health risks and improving maintenance and remodeling practices while

maintaining a healthy home environment for occupants. Sessions will focus primarily on exposure to lead and home toxicants that may cause short- and long-term health effects as a result of these exposures. This conference will also cover the US Environmental Protection Agency's Renovation, Repair, and Painting Rule (RRP). This conference is free and registration may be done online at www.idph.state.il.us/training.htm. Space is limited. Early registration is recommended.

The 2009 National Environmental Public Health Conference: Healthy People in a Healthy Environment seeks to promote the nation's environmental health capacity by enhancing the expertise of environmental health professionals - including public health and healthcare professionals, academic researchers, representatives from communities and organizations, as well as advocacy and business groups with a primary interest in environmental public health. The conference will be held October 25-28 in Atlanta, GA.

The American Public Health Association will be holding its Annual Meeting, November 7-11, 2009 in Philadelphia, PA. The theme this year is "Water and Public Health: the 21st Century Challenge." The conference will explore the latest public health challenges and learn about what can be done to protect our resources, our health and our world. For more information or to register, visit <http://www.apha.org/meetings/>.

ALLIANCE NEWS

The Alliance's Executive Director Patrick MacRoy traveled to Chicago this month to participate at the 2009 Community Summit: Communities Moving Towards Healthy Homes. The summit involved community-level planning sessions for developing strategic plans to achieve the elimination of lead poisoning and opportunities to access resources related to healthy homes. Patrick spoke about how to move existing lead programs towards healthy homes goals.

If you appreciate the news and information in the Alliance Alert, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Alliance! We rely on donations from individuals and organizations to allow us to do policy work in Washington and across the country. You can make a one-time donation or sign up to make a recurring monthly or quarterly donation on our [website](#). Thank you for your support!

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