

HEALTH & SAFETY

A NEWSLETTER FOR NYSUT'S HEALTH AND SAFETY LEADERS

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Welcome to the first electronic *H&S News*

In keeping with NYSUT's effort to go green, the *Health & Safety* newsletter will now be offered only on the NYSUT website: www.nysut.org.

New guide for making safer back-to-school purchases

The Center for Health, Environment & Justice has released a new Back to School Guide to PVC-Free School Supplies to help parents choose safer, PVC-free school supplies. The guide is being released just in time for tax-free back-to-school shopping. Many parents are not aware of the toxic plastic used to make school supplies. In fact, the average child's character-themed backpack is filled with supplies and materials made from the most toxic plastic, polyvinyl chloride (PVC or vinyl).

A new analysis by the Environmental Working Group found Americans are exposed to up to 1,200 times more dioxin than the EPA considers safe, and the amount of dioxin infants are exposed to is up to 77 times higher than the level the agency has defined as harmless to the endocrine and immune systems. Children are particularly vulnerable to the harmful health effects of toxic chemicals, such as dioxin, that are released by the PVC lifecycle.

PVC contains dangerous chemical additives such as phthalates, lead, cadmium, and/or organotins, which can be

toxic to a child's health. Federal law has banned the use of phthalates in toys even as it is still used in children's school supplies. Both Congress and the President's Cancer Panel have called for greater regulation of such toxic chemicals in consumer products, but parents can act now to protect their children's health by making smart shopping choices.

Although PVC, the toxic plastic, is found in many name-brand products, many safer PVC-free products are available.

A few of the top tips for avoiding toxic PVC school supplies are:

1. Avoid backpacks with shiny plastic designs as they often contain PVC and may contain lead.
2. Use cloth lunchboxes or metal lunchboxes. Many lunchboxes are made of PVC, or coated with PVC on the inside.
3. Used cardboard, fabric-covered, or polypropylene binders. Most 3-ring binders are made of PVC.

Find the PVC-Free Back-to-School Guide available at: www.cbej.org/publications/PVCGuide/2010/PVCFree.pdf.

Online health and safety training available

Learn about green cleaning and communicable disease

<https://greencleaning.ny.gov/Training/login.aspx>

Diseases like MRSA and H1N1 raise a lot of questions, concern and anxiety. This web course covers information about green cleaning programs, communicable disease and enhanced green cleaning. The NYS Office of General Services (OGS) developed the course to provide "an awareness of potential

enhancements to green cleaning programs during communicable disease outbreaks so that they can be included in planning efforts and be successfully implemented."

Pre-tests and post-tests have been included, and a Certificate of Completion can be printed. You can download course materials such as training manuals and Quick Reference Cards from the Customizable Documents and Templates section for use with the online course.

Course materials were developed by the New York State Department of

Health as a module for the NYS Green Cleaning website hosted by the OGS. This training is one of several offered on the OGS website.

FEMA offers online self-study program

This is the training website of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. CEU credit is possible upon completion.

Online courses include: Fundamentals of Emergency Management; Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools, Introduction to the Incident Command System for Higher Education and An Introduction to Hazardous Materials. Find the complete course list at: <http://training.fema.gov/IS/crslst.asp>.



Representing more than 600,000 professionals in education and health care
For more, see www.nysut.org.

Repellant guide from U.S. EPA

A “repellent protection calculator” on the U.S. EPA website has information about how long EPA-registered repellents will work and how to use them. It also has information about other ways to protect yourself from biting insects as well as some of the reasons to use insect repellents. Go to this site for a search tool to help you choose skin-applied repellent products that will give you the protection you need: <http://cfpub.epa.gov/opppref/insect/#searchform>.

Be an IPM pest detective — new video game for students and teachers!

Eureka Elementary School has serious pest problems, including flies, cockroaches, rodents, ants and spiders. Fortunately these pests are the virtual kind — and so is the school — both are inside a new online video game designed to teach students and teachers about IPM. Developed by University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, Pest Private Eye and the Case of IPM in Schools is a valuable addition to any IPM education plan. Targeted to 4th - 6th graders, the website also includes a teacher’s guide with additional activities, lesson plans, pest profiles and a Pest Private Eye comic book. For more information, visit <http://schoolipm.unl.edu/pestpi>.

Keep an eye on construction/renovation work

Construction or renovation can be a big problem anywhere that occupants are in the building at the same time. This is particularly true of schools and colleges, where schedules begin again in late August/early September. If construction and renovation projects are not completed, be prepared for potential problems. While school or college is in session, important measures must be considered such

as separating construction from occupied spaces, proper exiting, providing ventilation, or moving the construction to evenings when

students are not in school.

K-12 schools are required to follow commissioner regulations Part 155 to protect building occupants. Every construction project has the uniform safety standards built into its specifications prior to approval by facilities planning. One of the most important requirements is to separate construction work from occupied spaces. Despite these regulations, many schools do not make sure contractors are adhering to the standards and protecting staff and students.

Make sure someone from your local union is keeping up to date with construction progress and can meet with appropriate administrators to ensure staff and student health, as well as safety before classes resume. If you need help, call your NYSUT regional office and speak to your labor relations specialist.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Health & Safety is a newsletter published periodically for New York State United Teachers’ Health and Safety Committee members. NYSUT locals and staff have permission to reprint all *Health & Safety* content.

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Online training available *continued from page 1*

The virtual walk-through

The “Virtual School Walkthrough: Identifying and Solving Common Indoor Air Quality Problems” virtually guides webinar participants through a comprehensive facility walk-through. Visit www.nucleanair.org/air/Programs/indoorAir.htm and click on one of seven links beneath the “videos” heading on the right side of the page.

Integrated Pest Management

A video of the June 3 “Integrated Pest Management in

Schools” webinar is available to view at www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/webconferences.html, as well as a PDF of the slide presentation, a question-and-answer document and other resources from the expert speakers.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

STATE

The Assembly is finished with its business except for budgetary work, so we do not expect non-budget bills to move. Bills that we have listed will be re-introduced next legislative session. Check the fall and winter newsletters to find important health and safety bills that affect NYSUT members.

Bills that you’ll see next year will include the school workplace violence prevention bill, the classroom temperature bill and a bill about abusive work environments that would give employees a civil cause of action.