

# HEALTH & SAFETY

A NEWSLETTER FOR NYSUT'S HEALTH AND SAFETY LEADERS

FALL 2012

[www.nysut.org](http://www.nysut.org)

VOL. 19, NO. 1

## Hempstead CTA gets serious about safety

No one should doubt Hempstead Classroom Teachers Association's commitment to improving health and safety in schools. In July, nine Hempstead CTA members and one Hempstead Teaching Assistants Association member gave up two days of summer vacation to attend a 10-hour OSHA training class given by NYSUT Health and Safety Specialist Wendy Hord. This was not the first meeting or training they attended, nor will it be the last.

A few years ago, the local had a positive relationship with the district and regular district-wide health and safety committee meetings. Then a new superintendent came in and the meetings stopped. After some push-back from the local, district-wide meetings started again, but according to the local, were too infrequent and ineffective for the number of problems in Hempstead schools.

Winsome Brown-Cooke is chair of the local's health and safety committee and a member of NYSUT's Task Force

on Health and Safety. She is also a member of AFT Train the Trainer, an OSHA general Industry Outreach Trainer and a CPR/AED/First Aid Instructor.

She knew that more needed to be done and that beefing up her local's own committee was a good place to start. Added training and strategic planning, she said, would help address building issues and make the joint, district-wide and building committees more effective. As Winsome said, "Union and administration must work together to build a stronger relationship in developing safer and healthier working environments and buildings. I believe that a safer and healthier workplace will make healthier employees and produce higher academic outcomes."

Last year, the AFT received an OSHA grant to fund support for a local union's health and safety committee. The national contacted NYSUT Health and Safety Specialist Wendy Hord who suggested Hempstead. Amy Bahruth from the AFT Health and Safety Program has been working with the committee since December 2011. As one of her first tasks, Amy helped the committee survey the membership.

*Members of HCTA Health & Safety Committee looking up standards in their OSHA 10-hour class*



*Brown-Cooke*

Members returned 309 surveys. The majority of respondents were teachers but paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, social workers, library/media specialists, psychologists and other professionals also returned surveys.

The results have given them a clear picture of member concerns. The top three concerns were associated with poor indoor environmental quality, such as temperature extremes, mold and housekeeping; communicable and infectious disease, such as influenza, and workplace stress.

The committee has also begun to identify which "fixes" are easier than others, prioritizing the concerns, and developing strategies for getting things done. They understand how important it is to be successful, and being able to correct problems is crucial to maintain their momentum and enthusiasm.

Health and safety training will continue during professional development days for members this fall. This had been identified as a problem through the survey as the overwhelming majority (from 86 to 98 percent) of respondents in each school stated they had not attended any health and safety training provided by the district, because district training opportunities did not exist.

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# Hempstead CTA serious about safety

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Members of the committee also plan on being active participants in the District-Wide Health and Safety Committee.

"Health and safety is a concern for parents, students, employees and employers," said NYSUT VP Kathleen Donahue. "It's an important opportunity to identify and form relationships with influential partners in the community and to raise the union's profile at the same time."

The committee has reached out to the other unions in the district to work together on issues. Some of the strategic planning activities of the health and safety committee have helped HCTA improve relationships in the community. In their March meeting, the committee went through an activity where they identified "players" in the community and which of those groups or individuals would have an



Donahue

interest in safer and healthier schools. Since many of the committee members are also officers or building reps of the local, they were enthusiastic about how the activity broadened their view of potential community partners.

Bahruth is optimistic about the future of HCTA's health and safety efforts. "This committee is a great working group that represents the broad constituency of the local's membership. They are committed to improving working and learning conditions in the district and have the drive and enthusiasm to get things done."

## Upcoming webinar: Cleaning for infection control in schools

Schools and colleges are petri dishes for the spread of communicable diseases like flu, pink eye, MRSA and whooping cough. On Oct. 3 at 4 pm, NYSUT is hosting a webinar about how to clean during communicable disease outbreaks in schools. The webinar will be about one hour and cover issues such as: typical diseases spread in schools; diseases of particular concern and cleaning vs. disinfecting during outbreaks.

Register for the webinar at: [www.nysut.org/eReg/CIC1012](http://www.nysut.org/eReg/CIC1012)



## 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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## Fifth annual back-to-school guide to less toxic school supplies

Many common, plastic school supplies off-gas chemicals that are harmful to children's health. Check out this year's Guide to PVC-Free School Supplies to learn what to buy, what not to, and how to promote stronger consumer protection laws. Shop smart! This back-to-school season, ditch the vinyl, and choose safer, non-toxic school supplies.

Why should you be concerned? A growing body of evidence links phthalates with learning disabilities, birth defects, obesity, and asthma. And phthalates aren't the only toxic chemical in PVC! Dioxins released throughout the PVC life-cycle are also known to be harmful to children's health.

Last spring, NYSUT partnered with CHEJ and UFT to present a webinar on PVC plastics in schools that includes the science behind the concern and available alternatives. The recorded webinar is posted on NYSUT's health and safety web page at [www.nysut.org/healthandsafety](http://www.nysut.org/healthandsafety).



Luckily, there are many PVC-free alternatives on the market, and CHEJ has investigated and compiled them in this one easy guide. There are over 40 product categories of safer gear for the fall, including backpacks, lunchboxes, binders, art supplies, electronics, and more.

Download the guide at: <http://bit.ly/PkozCJ> and the wallet-sized version at: <http://bit.ly/Rgv5Oj>



**Save the date!**

**2013 Statewide Health and Safety Conference  
March 1–2 in Saratoga**

Details in the Upcoming Winter Newsletter (posted in November).

## Free NYSUT ELT training available!

# ELT

**nysut** Education & Learning Trust

Advance your career. Refresh your mind.

NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust is proud to offer a new teacher health and safety training at NO costs to locals:

- Engaging the Disruptive Student

ELT also offers School-Related Professional workshops for professional development at NO cost to locals:

- Addressing Aggressive Student Behavior in Schools
- Supporting Students with Autism
- Disability Awareness
- Dealing with Difficult Students

These workshops are made possible through a partnership with NYSUT's Safety and Health training grant from the NY State Department of Labor.

Contact ELT for more information and to secure your professional development today! Call 1-800-528-6208 or visit: [www.nysut.org/elt](http://www.nysut.org/elt).

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

***We still need your stories for health and safety legislative priorities – extreme building temperatures and school workplace violence prevention.***

NYSUT's two priority health and safety bills may be discussed when the legislature comes back in the fall. **S2824 STEWART-COUSINS; A2344 Spano** establishes a maximum temperature in school and college buildings. **A3914 (Lancman)** would include K-12 schools in a workplace violence prevention regulation already in effect for all other public employers in New York.

In order to have an effective campaign around the bills, we need to be able to talk about how those issues have impacted our members.

If you have been hit, kicked, bitten, threatened by a student, parent, administration, co-worker or school visitor or have been injured from restraining a student, we want to hear from you and how the incident affected you and your co-workers.

If you have been impacted by high building/room temperatures in school or a higher ed facility we want to hear from you. This would include health impacts to you and students as well as impacts on learning and classroom functioning, like equipment, experiments and animals.

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***"It's crucial that we hear from members. Their experiences with these issues are compelling and would help us tremendously in convincing legislators that we need these bills passed."***

— Kathleen Donahue  
Vice President, NYSUT

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Send your stories to [psbands@nysutmail.org](mailto:psbands@nysutmail.org). In your email, please let us know who you are and where you are located, whether a specific school district or campus or town/city/village/zip code (NAME AND EXACT ADDRESS OPTIONAL).

Also let us know if you may be willing to testify at a hearing, visit your legislator in their local office with other NYSUT members or talk to your colleagues about participating in these advocacy efforts.

### FEDERAL

**S847 (Lautenberg) SAFE CHEMICALS ACT:** This bill is the first to update chemical laws in over 36 years. Would require EPA to, among other things: set minimum data sets for chemical substances; require testing of any chemical substance; require manufacturers to bear the burden of proof that their chemicals meet safety standards; and set up an internet-accessible public database of information on toxicity, use and exposure to chemical substances.

*Voted to go to the Senate floor from the Committee on Environment and Public Works. To be reported with an amendment.*

## SchoolReach offers anti-bullying grants

CyberBully Hotline, an anonymous bullying reporting tool, is available to schools and districts with a free and reduced lunch rating of 31 percent or higher. Grants of \$2,500 will cover a 12-month service period for CyberBully Hotline.

The hotline is designed to prevent and reduce bullying. Students can call or text when they see bullying and school representatives can provide support and instruction for dealing with the situation.

Applications are reviewed and grants awarded as they come in. The program ends Oct. 31, or when the grant funds run out. Grant applications are available at [cyberbullyhotline.com](http://cyberbullyhotline.com).



## NYSUT anti-bullying materials available online

NYSUT has developed resources and tipsheets for students, parents, educators and others in the community to help recognize, prevent and stop bullying, including cyber-bullying.



Visit the Social Justice and Labor Center on the NYSUT website: [http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/bs.xsl/labor\\_18180.htm](http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/bs.xsl/labor_18180.htm).



## New cleaning products database

Environmental Working Group (EWG) has a new database with more than 2,000 household cleaners ranked on how hazardous their ingredients are and how much information is on their labels.

EWG's analysis found many products that contain ingredients known to cause asthma or are contaminated with carcinogens.

As the EWG site says, "Green' products aren't necessarily any better. Many of them boast of using ingredients made from plants rather than petroleum — but there's little or no safety data for some plant-based ingredients. A truly green product should pose few risks to your health and to the environment — and be transparent about what's in it."

See the cleaners Hall of Shame at <http://www.ewg.org/cleaners/hallofshame/>



## New NIOSH factsheet on cleaning products health dangers

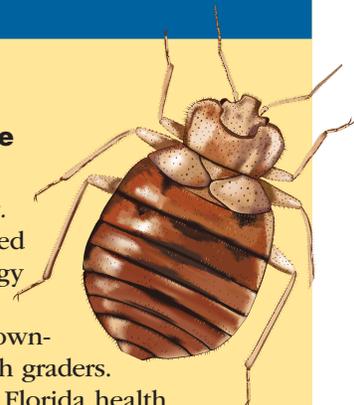
A recent infosheet released by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) giving information and best practices for workers who handle cleaning chemicals to help keep workers safe when working with cleaning chemicals, including green cleaning products.

Find the infosheet at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2012-126>.



## Bed bugs in schools resource

Bed Bugs and Book Bags, at [http://duval.ifas.ufl.edu/Bed\\_Bugs.shtml](http://duval.ifas.ufl.edu/Bed_Bugs.shtml) includes a 30-minute narrated presentation about bed bug biology followed by a short quiz. If you pass the quiz, you get a link to download the curriculum for third to fifth graders. The curriculum is correlated with Florida health education standards and could be adopted for NY.



## Protecting health care workers from disease

Health care workers often have close and prolonged contact with patients infected with a variety of diseases. During infectious disease outbreaks, health care workers are at higher risk of infection.

To help improve infection control and respiratory protection programs, the Occupational Health Branch (OHB) worked with the NIOSH National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory and health care partners to create a Respirator Program Toolkit.

Although directed at the California healthcare industry, the kit will be helpful in any healthcare setting and provides hospital and health care respirator program administrators with tools and resources to use respirators effectively and reduce exposure to infectious diseases. The toolkit includes a program guide, template, and evaluation checklist.

Find it at <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohb/Pages/RespToolkit.aspx>.



## EWG's 2012 Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce™

Eat your fruits and vegetables! The Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce will help you avoid fruits and vegetables that have pesticide residues and ones that are the most important to buy organic. You can lower your pesticide intake substantially by avoiding the 12 most contaminated fruits and vegetables and eating the least contaminated produce. <http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/summary/>



## Sensible steps to healthier school environments

A new guide for over 20 different environmental concerns in school environments now available on the EPA schools website. The direct link: <http://www.epa.gov/region8/humanhealth/children/SensibleSteps.pdf>