

# HEALTH & SAFETY

A NEWSLETTER FOR NYSUT'S HEALTH AND SAFETY LEADERS

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## Fulton's district-wide committee gets results

Bob McCaffrey, a member of the Fulton Teachers' Association, serves on the Fulton City School District Safety Committee. The committee runs so well that, according to McCaffrey, the BOCES health and safety representative uses it as a model he shares with other districts.

The committee is a diverse mix of union and management staff. Other committee members from the FTA include teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries and nurses. McCaffrey has found that regular attendance is difficult for some members of the FTA, so he attends the meetings regularly to ensure that the FTA's voice is heard. Custodians and food service workers are on the committee as well. Union reps inform staff about what the committee is doing and encourage members to report accidents or unsafe situations.

There are several management representatives including the human resource and financial officers, which is very helpful since many issues involve money and personnel.

The committee chair, Jerry Seguin, is the district's director of facilities, operations and transportation. McCaffrey said he doesn't mind that a manager is the chair because Seguin is approachable, positive and dedicated to the committee.

The district publicizes the committee's monthly meetings and sometimes community members attend to speak about issues such as classroom air quality. The local BOCES health and safety rep and the district's risk management carrier often attend meetings as well.

### How do they do it?

Fulton TA's Bob McCaffrey says that having an open and supportive safety committee chair is important, but there are some other key points that help:

- **Support from your executive board.** In addition to providing much needed credibility at the meetings, you may have to ask the exec board for its position on an issue and bring back the answer to the committee, or have the local's president intercede if a problem becomes too big to handle yourself.
- **Consistency.** This is vital. The more meetings you attend, the more others know you, and know you have the ear of the union and that you will show up the next month and expect answers.
- **Take notes.** Even though the Fulton committee takes minutes and gets them to members within a few days of the meeting to review, McCaffrey says that district or union rep personnel can change at any time and your own notes on what's happening can be important.
- **Be patient.** Know that sometimes it takes more than one meeting to truly address the cause of a problem rather than just treat the symptoms.
- **Be vigilant.** Don't be afraid to flex the union's muscle if needed (i.e. file a PESH complaint) to ensure the union is being heard and is part of the process.
- **Train.** Participate in learning opportunities like the NYSUT Health and Safety Conference or training from area COSH groups (committees or council on occupational safety and health) and read information about safety and health issues.
- **Advocate.** Speak up for others. "As NYSUT members we have to recognize when things aren't good for folks who are not in our group and speak up for them. The teachers' local is the big dog on the block and it makes a difference in helping others fix hazards," McCaffrey said.

### Importance of assessing problems

McCaffrey said: "The committee has permanent agenda items that we discuss every meeting. This helps us focus." Those items are reviewed

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# 2011 guide for less toxic school supplies now online

Reducing children's exposure to chemicals is a priority of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ). One way they help parents and other school supply buyers is with their PVC-free guide. The fourth-annual "Back-to-School Guide to PVC-Free School Supplies" suggests alternatives to the most common back-to-school school supplies made out of polyvinyl chloride (PVC or vinyl).

PVC contains multiple hazardous chemical additives, including phthalates, lead, cadmium and/or organotins, which can be toxic to children's health. When PVCs are manufactured or burned, dioxins are formed. Dioxins are a very toxic group of chemicals that can cause cancer and harm the

reproductive and immune systems.

CHEJ knows that the only way to reduce the demand for PVC products is to educate people about them and how to find safer alternatives. While some products are not properly labeled to identify them as containing PVC, PVC products are often labeled "vinyl" with the universal recycling symbol number "3" or the letters "V" or "PVC" underneath it. As CHEJ says, "Just remember — bad news comes in 3s, don't buy PVC."

The guide also has advice on avoiding other plastics that pose harm to children's health. You can find safer choices for art supplies, backpacks,



notebooks, three ring binders and other products. It also has a link to a wallet-guide. Find the guide at <http://chej.org/campaigns/pvc/>.

## 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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## New state law bans sale of child products containing TRIS

*Law protects children by banning TRIS Flame Retardant, a known cancer-causing substance, from child care products*

Governor Cuomo recently signed a law to ban the sale of child care products containing the flame retardant chemical Tris (2-chloroethyl) phosphate, commonly called TCEP, which has been known to cause cancer in test animals and has been banned from children's clothing for decades.

The "TRIS-Free Children and Babies Act" bans the sale of any consumer merchandise intended for use by children under age 3 if the product contains TCEP. Since 1977, TRIS has been banned from use in children's clothing, although its low cost has led to an increase of its use in baby gear including nursing pillows, car seats, crib positioners, baby carriers, high chairs, rocking chair foam and booster seats. The law applies to any products sold after Dec. 1, 2013.

TCEP is a carcinogenic flame retardant on California's Proposition 65 list of cancer-causing chemicals. Laboratory studies show TCEP causes tumors in the kidney and thyroid glands, causes

reductions in fertility and poor sperm quality, and interferes with brain signaling, causing hyperactivity. It is no longer produced in Europe and has been identified by Canada as posing a risk to human health. In a recent scientific study, TCEP was found in 17 percent of foam baby products tested.

NYSUT supported this bill, as a member of the JustGreen Partnership. "It takes forward-thinking leaders like Assemblyman Robert Sweeney and Sen. Mark Grisanti to pass the first state-level tris ban in the nation," said Kathy Curtis, Policy Director for Clean New York and co-coordinator of the JustGreen Partnership. "Until comprehensive, sensible chemical policy is a reality, we're glad we can depend on them to protect the health of New York's babies and children," Curtis added.

Advocates pointed to failures in the federal chemical regulatory system for ongoing use of chemicals linked to significant health problems. They called on

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## STATE

NYSUT's 2011-12 health and safety legislative agenda will give high priority to two bills:

### **A3914 (Lancman) School Workplace Violence Prevention Act**

Includes K-12 schools in the existing workplace violence prevention act. This bill would require school districts to develop and implement programs to prevent workplace violence. This bill would also authorize any public employee or representative of public employees who believes that a serious violation of a safety or health standard exists, or an imminent danger exists, to request an inspection by the Department of Labor.

Currently, all public employers in New York are required to follow this law, except for K-12 schools. Since the law was first passed in 2006, NYSUT, along with other unions who represent school employees, has supported including schools in this law. This law is focused on worker safety and is enforced by PESH. To see what the law and regulation require, go to [www.labor.state.ny.us/workerprotection/safetyhealth/workplaceviolence.shtm](http://www.labor.state.ny.us/workerprotection/safetyhealth/workplaceviolence.shtm) to read the law, regulations and tools to help employers comply with the law.

Keep watching the NYSUT health and safety page for information on supporting this bill and requests for your help in getting it passed.

### **S2824 (Stewart-Cousins); A2344 Spano: Establishing a maximum temperature in school buildings and indoor facilities**

The current language of this bill is not protective enough for employees and students and does not include higher education facilities. As written, the bill only requires districts to develop policies to address conditions that reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit. We will be working with bill sponsors to get amendments to the bill that would require employer action and include higher education.

Keep watching the NYSUT health and safety page for information on these bills and requests for your help in getting them passed.

## Study shows good hand hygiene reduces absenteeism in schools

A study published in the August 2011 issue of the *American Journal of Infection Control* shows that improved hand hygiene knowledge is positively associated with a decreased risk of transmitting infection among elementary school children.

The study looked at whether hand-washing programs among school children had a lasting effect in reducing school absences.

In 2008, Inge Nandrup-Bus, RN, directed a three-month intervention study on 656 students, ages 5–14, at two Denmark elementary schools (one designated as the intervention school and the other as the control school). Nandrup-Bus compared her results to

a similar study she performed in 2007. For the 2008 trial, the intervention school and the control school were reversed.

The intervention school students were each given one lesson in hand disinfection theory and practice and were told to disinfect their hands with ethanol gel three times during the school day.

Over the three months of the intervention, this change resulted in a 66 percent decrease in students with four or more days of absence and a 20 percent increase in children with zero absences compared to the 2007 data from the same school.

Interestingly, at the 2008 control school (which had been the 2007 intervention school) no significant changes in absenteeism were noted. Study authors say the result strongly suggests that even with low participation rates (20 percent in 2007 and 21 percent in 2008) and the passage of time, merely increasing hand hygiene education can have a long-term, significant impact on curbing the spread of infection.



## Wendy's world – A safe and healthy place

NYSUT Health and Safety Specialist Wendy Hord gives workshops to NYSUT health and safety activists around New York state. In this new column she will share some interesting and helpful information in a variety of formats.

This edition of the column is a true/false quiz. Have fun! (Answers are on the last page.)

### **Topic: Cleaning and communicable diseases at work**

1. I can bring cleaners from home to use at school. **T F**
2. Disinfectants are the only kind of product that adequately get rid of germs. **T F**
3. For most communicable diseases, kids don't have to be mandatorily excluded from school if they have them. **T F**

## NYSSHSC unveils new website

The New York Statewide School Health Services Center (NYSSHSC) provides technical assistance, resources and training to New York state school health professionals. Anyone looking for information on school health — including information about communicable diseases, vaccinations, and laws and guidelines — will find this website helpful. Included in their updated homepage is an alphabetical list of school health websites, news and events pages listing current issues in school health, and “hot buttons” linking frequently accessed resources on the page. Visit <http://schoolhealthservicesny.com/index.cfm> to learn more.



## Visit [allergyeats.com](http://allergyeats.com) for database of 600,000 restaurants

People with food allergies and intolerances have a new resource to address their concern about where they can safely dine out.

[AllergyEats.com](http://AllergyEats.com), a free, user-friendly website, has peer-based feedback about how well (or poorly) restaurants meet the needs of food-allergic customers. The peer ratings and search feature help food-allergic and gluten-intolerant diners to easily find local restaurants that will accommodate their specific dietary requirements — and avoid the ones that won't.

AllergyEats has been endorsed by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Gluten Intolerance Group, Massachusetts Restaurant Association, Chef Ming Tsai and more.



## National report: ‘Climate Change, the Indoor Environment and Health’

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asked the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to convene an expert committee to summarize the current state of scientific understanding with respect to the effects of climate change on indoor air and public health. It provided three examples of key questions to address:

- What are the likely impacts of climate change in the United States on human exposure to chemical and biological contaminants inside buildings, and what are the likely public health consequences?

- What are the likely impacts of climate change on moisture and dampness conditions in buildings, and what are the likely public health consequences?
- What are the priority issues for action?

The resulting report, at [www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=13115](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13115) addresses the impacts that climate change may have on the indoor environment and the resulting effect on health. It finds that steps taken to mitigate climate change may cause or worsen harmful indoor environmental conditions. The book discusses the role EPA should take in informing the public, health professionals, and those in the building industry about potential risks and what can be done to address them.

The study also recommends that building codes account for climate change projections; that federal agencies join to develop or refine protocols and testing standards for evaluating emissions from materials, furnishings, and appliances used in buildings; and that building weatherization efforts include consideration of health effects.



## Revised guidelines integrate health and safety into early education

“Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards — Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs” (3rd ed.) represents the best evidence, expertise, and experience on quality health and safety practices and policies that should be followed in early care and education settings. The updated book is a joint collaborative project of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education with support from the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Topics include staffing, program activities for healthy development, health promotion and protection, nutrition and food service, facilities, supplies, equipment and environmental health; play areas, playgrounds, and transportation; infectious diseases, children with special health care needs and disabilities, policies, and licensing and community action.

The book is available for purchase at <http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/index.html>

## New state law bans sale of child products containing TRIS

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Congress to reform the antiquated Toxic Substances Control Act, and urged the US Senate to pass the Safe Chemicals

Act, sponsored by both Sens. Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand.

For more information about TCEP

and other hazardous chemicals added to foam baby products, see [www.toxicfreefiresafety.org](http://www.toxicfreefiresafety.org).

# Fulton's district-wide committee gets results continued from page 1

every year for the committee to decide if they need to change or revise them.

One of those items is reviewing district accident and incident reports and work orders related to health and safety. The committee looks at why an incident might have happened and either recommends a plan or action item to reduce the chance of reoccurrence, or requests additional information.

## Results

There have been many successes for Fulton's district-wide committee. After reviewing several work orders about slippery and icy conditions in certain parking lots in winter, its recommendations included a change in maintenance schedule for those lots, which resulted in improved conditions. The committee worked with both the contractor that plows the lots and the in-house staff that sands and salts them to implement

the change. This is something the committee stays on top of every year.

The committee also reviewed information about burns that food service workers had sustained on their arms when they reached into the chest-high ovens to pull out trays.

Because food service reps were on the committee, they were able to present information about what appropriate kitchen equipment was available so the committee could make good recommendations on what would help the workers pull out the trays without burns. The district then made the changes needed, including extra-long oven mitts.

"I was glad Bob mentioned this success," said Wendy Hord, NYSUT health and safety specialist. "It shows the importance of having all workers represented on these committees."

The committee also tackled a child safety problem. Parents were dropping



**NYSUT V.P.  
Kathleen Donahue**

their children off at school before it officially opened, leaving them outside and unattended. Thanks to a committee recommendation, there is a new morning supervision program, where a staff member comes in early to let children in the building and be with them in a designated room.

"I commend the members of the Fulton TA for their commitment to regularly attending these meetings," said NYSUT Vice President Kathleen Donahue. "The collaborative process demonstrated in this district-wide committee is a model that should be emulated by districts across the state."



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1. False! The state Office of General Services, which oversees our school green cleaning law says: "Under no circumstances should faculty, staff or students bring their own cleaning products into a school facility." Products brought to school without the ok of the district pose potential hazards by not following the NYS green cleaning law for schools and federal and state right-to-know laws. District policy should allow school staff to have district-approved cleaning products. Staff need to be trained on the proper use of these products before their use.

2. False. Using a third-party certified all-purpose cleaner and friction can remove most germs and is good for most situations. Disinfectants are EPA registered pesticides designed to kill or inactivate microbes (germs). The overuse or misuse of disinfectants can pose a health hazard because they contain toxic ingredients. Use disinfectants where required and in high risk areas, know the law and clean first.

3. True. Only a few diseases require exclusion from school, i.e. chickenpox, measles, mumps and most others have suggested exclusion if certain symptoms or conditions are present. You can find out more at [www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable) for specific diseases/conditions.

## ANSWERS TO QUIZ