

CHE-Penn E-Newsletter #3, August, 2005

----- Coordinator's Report -----

July 14th, HEALTH IMPACTS OF MERCURY IN THE ENVIRONMENT - Dr. Laura Hewitson's presentation at the panel discussion at The Children's Institute was excellent. She did a wonderful job weaving in the emerging science on how mercury from drug preservatives and dental amalgam might be affecting human health with the solid evidence that consumption of fish must be limited to reduce negative health impacts. Heather Sage from PennFuture gave an update how we can work to reduce emissions in Pennsylvania and what the schedule is for the Pennsylvania mercury petition (see www.pennfuture.org for updates). Jo Ann Meier spoke briefly about the environmental links to breast cancer and invited Dr. Devra Davis from the Center for Environmental Oncology to give an update on the research linking mercury to a number of adult health problems, including breast cancer.

FALL EVENTS PLANNED: A second panel on the health impacts of mercury co-sponsored with the Healthy Children Project and PennFuture is being planned for late September at a location in the North Hills. In addition, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation Pittsburgh Affiliate has an ambitious series of programs planned for October and November. Notices will go out as soon as these dates become definite.

NOVEMBER 17th CHE-Penn event – Please hold the date!

Planning is underway for a dinner meeting for CHE-Penn partners on Thursday, November 17th at the Mellon Institute in Oakland. After the dinner Andrew Wakefield, PhD, will present his research on the possible connections between the MMR vaccine and autism. Please plan to join us to learn more about this controversial and provocative study.

----- **Pennsylvania organizations mobilize for stronger Mercury controls** -----

On August 3rd, PennFuture delivered a letter signed by more than 60 public health, children's, sporting, faith-based and environmental organizations to Pennsylvania Secretary Kathleen McGinty in support of a strong mercury rule that will require 90% reduction from all coal-fired power plants in Pennsylvania.

On July 27, 2005, three state legislators—Sen. Mary Jo White (Butler, Clarion, Erie, Forest, Venango & Warren counties); Sen. Raphael Musto (Carbon, Luzerne, & Monroe counties); and Rep. William Adolph (Delaware County)—submitted a letter to DEP, encouraging the Department to "reconsider its intentions to craft a Pennsylvania-specific mercury emission rule," suggesting that DEP should abandon their efforts on this issue altogether.

Given the threat posed by mercury pollution, and the fact that DEP hasn't yet committed to requiring 90% cuts from all Pennsylvania power plants, this letter was especially troubling. The critical next step in the process will occur when DEP unveils their final proposal, likely in November.

PennFuture urges you and your organization to take action. Please call Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Kathleen McGinty at (717) 787-2814 and say: "Please put our children's health first by moving forward with a strong mercury rule that requires 90% reductions in mercury pollution from all of Pennsylvania's coal-fired power plants." Feel free to share reasons why reducing mercury pollution is important to you.

----- Announcement: **Sierra Club to Host Mercury Hair Testing Event, August 10** -----

You may have heard the warnings about eating too much tuna and other fish. That's because some fish can be high in mercury, and 1 in 6 women of childbearing age already has enough mercury in her body to put an unborn baby at risk of developmental problems. The biggest source of mercury emissions in the U.S. is coal-fired power plants. Several of the dirtiest, highest mercury-emitting plants in the country are right here in Southwestern PA.

Fortunately, there's an easy way to find out your mercury level. The Sierra Club will be hosting a non-profit mercury hair-testing event on Wednesday, August 10 at noon in Squirrel Hill. By cutting and sending in a small piece of hair, an academic lab will let you know how much mercury is in your body, and what you can do about it – for yourself, and as a community.

To reserve your free test, contact Rachel Martin at 412-802-6161 or rachel.martin@sierraclub.org.

----- CHE-Penn Partner Profile: **Center for Environmental Oncology** -----

The University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute (UPCI) Center for Environmental Oncology (<http://www.upci.upmc.edu/ceo/>) was formed to improve the understanding of avoidable causes of cancer development and recurrence. The Center, launched in September 2004, strives to provide a state-of-the-art, hospital-based cross-disciplinary approach to identify controllable or avoidable causes of cancer linked with the environment, and to create and implement interventions that inform, educate and change individual and institutional behaviors.

Specific goals of the CEO include:

- Building links from basic research to clinical studies of avoidable carcinogens, including hormonally mediated agents
- Developing and applying state-of-the-art technology to the identification of carcinogenic exposures
- Pilot-testing institutional interventions to modify cancer risks consistent with "greening" facilities, and providing healthy options regarding exercise, nutrition, and avoidable chemical exposures
- Educating and training health professionals and communities
- Informing patients, their families and communities about cancer risks and ways to reduce their chance of recurrence
- Analyzing economic and other policy impacts of proposed interventions

--- Announcement – **Diesel Powered Motor Vehicle Idling Regulation Enforceable** ---

Adopted by the Board of Health and approved by County Council and Chief Executive Dan Onorato, a new rule in Allegheny County limits the time diesel powered motor vehicles may idle to no more than five consecutive minutes. Exemptions are allowed under certain circumstances, including traffic conditions, boarding passengers, queuing, engine warm-up or cool-down, hot or cold weather, safety and maintenance. To view the entire regulation with exemptions visit <http://www.gasp-pgh.org/diesel/index.html>

Now enforceable throughout the county, this important, commonsense regulation will reduce people's exposure to harmful diesel exhaust by limiting the idling time of trucks, Port Authority buses, tour buses, waste haulers, and other on-road diesel vehicles.

Citizens will play a critical role in helping to implement this new regulation, which will be enforced by the Allegheny County Health Department and individual municipalities. GASP encourages the public to report suspected violations to the proper authorities immediately, at 412-687-ACHD (2243) or your municipality.

According to the recent *Clean Air Task Force report, Diesel and Health in America: The Lingering Threat*, locally diesel is responsible for 237 deaths, 340 heart attacks, and nearly 4,000 asthma attacks annually due to the fine particulates found in diesel exhaust.

----- Announcement – **Mesothelioma Research Needed** -----

Pa. Sen. Arlen Specter introduced a bill that would establish a trust fund that would compensate victims of asbestos exposure. The proposed bill would create a \$140-billion trust fund for individuals with asbestos related disease. Under the terms of the bill mesothelioma victims would get a lump-sum payment of \$1.1 million in return for relinquishing their right to sue. Mesothelioma is the most deadly of cancers caused by exposure to asbestos.

Absent from the bill were plans to fund mesothelioma research. Dr. Bret Williams, who suffers from pleural mesothelioma, said "What sickens me is the continued failure of our elected officials to completely ban asbestos and adequately fund research. I don't know about most mesothelioma patients but I want a cure much more than I want money."

Senator Specter acknowledged that asbestos in the U.S. is not merely a litigation crisis as it is so often called, but is in fact an *occupational health crisis*. He acknowledged the need for a cure for mesothelioma, and pledged to look into how much of the National Cancer Institute's \$5 billion cancer research budget is being used for mesothelioma research.

Yet early drafts of this new trust fund bill make no mention of the most obvious and humane solution, funding research to actually develop treatments for asbestos disease. Mesothelioma is almost uniformly fatal and has an average prognosis of only about a year and receives almost no federal research funding.

To learn more about mesothelioma and how you can support research visit: www.marf.org.

----- Announcement – **Mesothelioma Research Fundraiser** -----

The Pittsburgh Chapter of the Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation (MARF) will be hosting the fourth annual “Dance For Me So Others Might Live” dinner/dance fundraiser on Saturday, September 24 in Riverview Park, Observatory Hill, featuring an Italian cuisine buffet followed by auctions, door prizes, 50/50 raffle and dancing.

This event is designed to generate funds for research, promote awareness and to commemorate the struggle of those who have fought, are fighting and will fight against mesothelioma - asbestos cancer.

The dinner/dance will be from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 (buffet served from 5:00 - 7:00). Advance tickets are \$25.00. Please call Nancy at 412-276-0702 or Alice 412-734-3195 or email danceformeso@cs.com. All proceeds benefit MARF.

-----Announcement – **Allegheny Co. Public Participation Panel**-----

What: Public meeting hosted by the Allegheny County Public Participation Panel. The purpose of the meeting is to get public input for the 2007-2010 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the mechanism used to inform the State Transportation Committee about our region’s priorities. This meeting will also include multiple planning partners; you can talk to representatives from PennDOT, Allegheny County, Pittsburgh Department of City Planning, Port Authority of Allegheny County, and SPC. You can provide your official testimony for the TIP at the meeting, or you can submit testimony up until August 18th online (see: http://www.spcregion.org/trans_ppp_abstract.shtml.) There is a specific format that SPC uses to collect and maintain the testimony.

When: Monday, August 8, 12:00 and 4:30 p.m. (2 identical sessions)

Where: Regional Enterprise Tower, 31st floor, 425 Sixth Ave., Downtown Pittsburgh

Why: This is your chance to provide input to the way we prioritize transportation and related projects in the county and the region. Please attend!

-----**Please submit to CHE-Penn e-News**-----

The deadline for the July e-newsletter is August 30, 2005. Please send short (200 words or less) announcements and events to list to che-penn@comcast.net