

CHE-Penn E-Newsletter #4, September, 2005

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

Over the past week we have all watched in horror as one of the greatest public health disasters of our time is unfolding across the southern Gulf Coast. As a nation we're mourning for the dead and dying and agonizing about how the displaced will adjust. We're concerned about the recovery of the fragile ecosystem and the quality of life for those who remained and those who will return. Hurricane Katrina's impact — just in terms of the immediate impact on human health — is now estimated to be over 10,000 deaths; the poor, elderly and ill have fared the worst. As federal and local governments and emergency response teams struggle to save lives and restore order, this disaster is a warning to all of us to have more respect for the power of nature and the need for emergency planning for all people in our communities and concern for everyone's welfare. National CHE is planning a special call on this disaster.

In local health and environment news:

A five year old autistic boy undergoing chelation therapy in a Butler County doctor's office died on August 23, 2005. While the autopsy and other test results will not be known for several months, this tragedy has cast a pall on such alternative treatments and puts additional strain on families with autistic children looking for possible cures. A key goal of CHE-Penn is to foster civil dialogue, but not at the expense of grieving families. So, along with the Healthy Children Project and PennFuture, we have put the planned September event on mercury and children's health on hold until later this fall.

Announce-only email list for CHE-Penn:

This is the last time I will send you the CHE-Penn e-newsletter as a regular email; I will set up an announce-only mailing list for CHE-Penn. You will receive a notice that you have been added in the next week or so. Due to SPAM filters on my outgoing email, I can only send 20 or so emails in a group, so with more than 80 partners now, and more to join, an automated mailing list will greatly ease the job of keeping in touch with you.

Dr. Terry Collins, Director of the Institute for Green Oxidation Chemistry at Carnegie-Mellon University is coordinating a **dinner meeting for CHE-Penn partners** set for **Thursday, November 17, 2005** at the Mellon Institute in Oakland. After the dinner Andrew Wakefield, Ph.D., 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. The dinner will feature Indian food and take place from 5-7 PM; the talk will begin at 7:30 p.m. In our short 2 hours CHE-Penn partners will be able to make introductions and briefly discuss our work; after Dr. Wakefield's talk there will be more time for informal discussion. Space is limited; please RSVP no later than November 1, 2005 to che-penn@comcast.net.

Paulette Schreiber, C.R.N.P., **Elk Regional Health Center**, invites your group to participate in the environmental health fair on Saturday, November 5, 2005 in St. Mary's, PA (Elk County). The morning will consist of speakers including Steffi Domike, M.F.A., CHE-Penn; Terry Collins, Ph.D., CMU; Devra Davis, Ph.D., M.P.H. from the Center for Environmental Oncology at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute; Heather Sage, M.En., Director of Outreach for Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future (PennFuture) and Pennsylvania State Representative Dan Surra. In the afternoon the organizers plan to

have numerous exhibits on health and the environment. Lunch and transportation from Pittsburgh will be provided by the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation of Pittsburgh. For more info call 814-788-8174, or email np_pcs@elkregional.com.

Steffi Domike, CHE-Penn Coordinator

----- **NEWS REPORT: Lower Levels of Some Chemicals Found** -----

July 22, 2005 –The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in its third National Report on Exposure to Environmental Chemicals revealed that Americans have lower levels of lead, secondhand-smoke byproducts and other potentially dangerous substances in their bodies than they did a decade ago. This report was first released in 2001 and has been updated every two years. For its latest findings, the CDC took blood and urine samples from about 2,400 people in 2001 and 2002 and tested for 148 environmental chemicals, including metals, pesticides, insect repellants and disinfectants.

Elevated lead levels in US children between the ages of one and five dropped in those studied from 4.4 percent in the early 1990s to 1.6 percent between 1999 and 2002. Nonsmokers' levels of cotinine, a product of nicotine, showed a drop of 75 percent in adults and 68 percent in children between the early 1990s and 2002.

No women in the survey had dangerous concentrations of methyl mercury, which can come from eating shellfish or fish. However, the CDC said mercury levels in women of childbearing age should be monitored because 5.7 percent of women in this age group had levels close to what is believed to cause birth defects. About 5 percent of those surveyed over 20 years old had cadmium, from cigarette smoke, in their blood at a level that could cause a kidney injury. Traces of aldrin and dieldrin, pesticides discontinued in 1970 in the US, were very low or undetectable in adults.

Dr. Devra Davis said that there is good news and bad news in this study. "The good news is the noted drop in levels of regulated pesticides in the human body. The bad news is the continuing evidence of exposure to phthalates and other hormone disrupting chemicals to men and women of reproductive age. And one of the important pieces of this study shows that levels of lead and other pollutants are higher in blacks than in whites, reflecting greater risks to racial minorities."

The complete study is available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/exposurereport>

----- **EVENT: Saturday, September 24, 2005 – MARF 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 to 9 PM (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.

----- EVENT: Tuesday, September 27, 2005 – Sierra Club Town Hall Meeting -----

The Sierra Club is holding a “Town Hall Meeting on Tuesday, September 27, 7:00 PM at the Wightman School, 5604 Solway Street (corner of Solway and Wightman in Squirrel Hill) to discuss the problem of mercury pollution and what citizens can do about it. For more information, contact Rachel at 412-802-6161 or rachel.martin@sierraclub.org

----- EVENT: Saturday, October 1, 2005 – GASP 2005 Annual Benefit -----

The Group Against Smog and Pollution annual benefit takes place on Saturday, October 1, 2005 from 6:30 – 10:00 PM at Rodef Shalom Synagogue on Fifth Avenue in Oakland. Titled “Transportation Solutions: Putting America in the Driver’s Seat,” this fundraiser will be an opportunity to learn about automotive technologies that could reduce Americans’ contributions to oil dependence and climate change. Speakers include Isaac Porche III, Research Scientist for the RAND Corporation and Bob Banerjee, Marketing Manager for Capital Technologies International. For more information see <http://www.gasp-pgh.org>.

----- EVENT: October 6 – 8, 2005 – Mesothelioma Symposium in Las Vegas -----

The second International Symposium on Malignant Mesothelioma takes place October 6 – 8, 2005 at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Building on the success of last year’s Symposium, they have great expectations for this year. The Symposium will again combine a high level scientific/medical conference with material directly relevant to patients, caregivers, family members, and others interested in the disease and the battle to eradicate it. This is another huge step forward for the meso community to come together, advance meso research, and be educated, encouraged and supported.

Go to <http://www.marf.org/symposium> for program announcement, registration form or additional information.

--- EVENT: Saturday, October 8, 2005 – Environmental Legacy of Steel Industry ---

On Saturday, October 8, 1:30 PM, Conrad D. Volz, Dr. P.H, M.P.H., will give a talk, “Exposure Assessment of Pennsylvania Communities Contaminated by Legacy Iron and Steel Industry (ISI) Waste” at the historic Pump House on Waterfront Drive in Homestead.

Numerous communities in Pennsylvania, particularly those surrounding Pittsburgh, have been harmed by contamination from legacy Iron and Steel Industry (ISI) production sites. This presentation will explore the potential health hazards, exposure pathways associated with legacy ISI waste. It will also address requirements, issues and questions, which need to be addressed to evaluate the public health sustainability of land use alternatives.

The Pump House is located east of Homestead's Waterfront development, just past the railroad bridge on the river side of Waterfront Drive. Parking is available in front of the historic brick structure.

----- **EVENT: Monday, October 17, 2005 – Rally for Single Payer Healthcare** -----

Pennsylvanians United for Single-payer Healthcare (PUSH) is co-sponsoring a rally on Monday October 17, 11 AM to 1 PM in the Capitol Rotunda in Harrisburg as part of the Pennsylvania HealthCare Solutions Coalition (www.pahcsc.org). This action is in support of the Pennsylvania Balanced & Comprehensive Health Care Reform Act Of 2005. A copy of the bill is available on the coalition's website.

PUSH is soliciting endorsements of the proposed legislation from individuals and professional, religious or community groups. Endorsements and requests for a seat on the bus from Pittsburgh to the rally can be emailed to Dr. Scott Tyson at TysMar@aol.com with a copy to Sandy Orr sandyatpush@yahoo.com. Or send a note to: Just Health Care, 33 Terminal Way, Suite 407, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Attorney Steve Larchuk of PAHCSC, who drafted the bill, will speak on "Remedies for a Sick Healthcare System" on Thursday, September 29th, 2005 at 7 PM at the Kearns Spirituality Center, 9000 Babcock Blvd., on the grounds of LaRoche College. This talk is sponsored by the Association of Pittsburgh Priests.

The next general meeting of Just Health Care will be held from 9:30 to 11:30 AM on Saturday, September 24, 2005 in the fourth floor conference room at 33 Terminal Way (between Third and Fourth Streets, off Carson Street in the South Side in Pittsburgh).

----- **Pitt's Healthy Black Family Project Gains New Support** -----

August 24, 2005 –The University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health's (GSPH) Center for Minority Health (CMH) received a \$500,000 matching grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for its ground-breaking Healthy Black Family Project (HBFP), an intervention designed to prevent diabetes and hypertension in African American neighborhoods in Pittsburgh's East End. This new grant makes the total raised for this project \$1.4 million, with earlier grants coming from the Pittsburgh Foundation, DSF Charitable Foundation, Highmark Foundation and the Poise Foundation.

Launched in October 2004, the HBFP team has been conducting door-to-door recruitment of African American families to join in a multi-year effort to improve diet, increase physical activity and reduce stress. This comprehensive approach translates the best of public health and medical science into concrete changes people can make to take control of their health by reducing risk factors for chronic disease.

Recognized for national leadership in minority health, CMH was established in 1994 and is committed to taking a leading role in the nation's prevention agenda to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities as described in Healthy People 2010, a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services initiative.

See <http://newsbureau.upmc.com/MedSurg2/ThomasGrant2005.htm> for more information.