

# ALLIANCE ALERT

A MONTHLY ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER BY THE ALLIANCE FOR HEALTHY HOMES

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## January is Radon Action Month

EPA has designated January as National Radon Action Month in order to raise awareness about the health effects of radon exposure, promote radon testing and mitigation, and advance the use of **radon-resistant new construction**. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer deaths among nonsmokers in America, causing about 20,000 deaths each year.



Because radon is invisible, odorless, and tasteless, testing is the only way to know if a home has a high concentration of radon. EPA and the Surgeon General recommend that all residences below the third floor of a building be tested for radon. There are both short-term and long-term tests. EPA recommends initial measurements for radon be taken with short-term tests placed in the lowest lived-in level of the residence. Radon testing kits are available at a discounted price from the National Safety Council's Radon Hotline (1-800-767-7236) and at various retail locations such as hardware stores.

More information for both consumers and advocates is available at <http://www.epa.gov/radon/nram/>.

## Eliminating Lead Exposure in New Jersey Estimated to Save \$27 Billion

A study commissioned by the New Jersey Department of the Public Advocate concluded that nearly eliminating lead exposure amongst all children aged zero to six in New Jersey would result in benefits of \$27 billion over their lifetimes. The study quantified the benefits of reducing blood lead levels to less than 1µg/dL for all children, looking at the impacts of lead exposure on future earnings, as well as the costs of special education, medical treatment, criminal activity, incarceration, reliance on public assistance and premature death. The study also considered the costs to the state budget, finding elimination of blood lead levels over 1 would save nearly \$9 billion for the state over the children's lifetimes. The benefits could reasonably be expected to be similar for future generations of children.

A [full copy of the report](#) is available from the Advocate's office, as well as a [summarizing press release](#). The study was conducted by Columbia University researcher Peter Muennig and City College of New York student Pichchenda Bao.

## **EPA Seeks Comment on Use of Canceled Pesticide to Fight Bedbugs**

The Ohio Department of Agriculture has requested the US EPA to allow it to use the banned pesticide “propoxur” to combat bedbugs under an emergency public health exemption. Citing the well publicized resurgence of bed bugs, and their increasing resistance to pyrethroid pesticides labeled for this type of use, Ohio requested that EPA temporarily allow use of propoxur to combat the pests. EPA effectively banned spray forms of propoxur in 2007 when it accepted a voluntary cancellation request from product manufacturers following nearly two decades of reviews and increasingly limited legal applications. Propoxur is highly neurotoxic and carcinogenic, and has been shown to remain in homes for long after its application.

The Alliance opposes an exemption to the propoxur ban and encourages healthy housing advocates to contact the EPA to urge them to deny Ohio’s request. Although the request would apply immediately only to Ohio, several states are reported to have expressed interest in replicating the request. The short-term benefits of propoxur use to address bedbugs are not worth the long-term risks to children and other occupants, especially given the availability of alternatives. Rather than rely on highly toxic sprays, bedbugs can and should be controlled through IPM methods, including limiting access, use of non-toxic steam or heat treatments, and minimum toxicity treatments.

For more information, please see [EPA’s request for comments](#) as well as a letter from [Beyond Pesticides and others opposing the request](#). Comments are due January 21, and may be submitted at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) using docket number EPA–HQ–OPP–2009–0856.

## **Advocates Encourage EPA to Add RRP to Enforcement Priorities**

On January 4, [EPA published a proposed list](#) of National Enforcement and Compliance Assistance Priorities for Fiscal Years 2011-2013. Developed every three years, the National Enforcement Priorities help EPA and its state partners “focus resources toward the most significant environmental problems and human health challenges.” EPA will accept public comment on the list, including adding additional topic areas, through January 19.

While the list includes many worthy enforcement activities, including pesticide use at day-care facilities and community-based approaches to environmental justice, missing from the list is the Renovation, Repair, and Painting Rule. As one of the last remaining pieces of Title X, the RRP rule will close a significant loophole in lead-based paint regulation, requiring all activity that disturbs lead-based paint to be done safely. It has the potential to prevent lead exposure amongst millions of children. The regulated community, including hundreds of thousands of painters, remodelers, and contractors were previously unregulated by the EPA. Many of these individuals and companies are ignorant of the requirements and others may see the requirements as being unlikely to be seriously enforced and therefore unworthy of their consideration. Industry leaders and advocates agree that a strong enforcement presence will be required to see the rule successfully implemented.

The Alliance strongly encourages advocates to write the EPA and encourage them to add enforcement of the Renovation, Repair, and Painting rule to the list of enforcement priorities. Adding RRP to the list will help both send the message to regulated industry that EPA is taking enforcement of the rule seriously and encourage EPA to assign the necessary resources to enforce the rule.

Comments may be submitted on [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) referencing docket number EPA–HQ–OECA–2009–0986 through January 19.

## Obama Administration Promotes Anti-Regulatory Economist to Gatekeeper Role



The [Washington Post](#) as well as several [blogs](#), reported in early December that Cass Sunstein, the head of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), detailed conservative, anti-regulatory economist Randall Lutter from the FDA to assist at OIRA. An arm of OMB, OIRA has substantial influence over Federal Agency Regulations, as agencies have to submit proposed rules to OIRA for review and comment before publishing them.

Mr. Lutter is well known to lead poisoning prevention advocates, having previously [written extensively](#) on how HUD and EPA's lead standards are too strict. Amongst Mr. Lutter's more "interesting" rationales for this conclusion was that HUD and EPA measured the benefits of decreased lead exposures to the children, rather than measuring the benefits to the parents, arguing that children will live longer lives and earn more money than their parents irregardless of their lead exposure and it is therefore unfair to force parents to have to pay for the cost of lead hazard control. Further, Mr. Lutter's statement, "... the children who would benefit from reduced lead hazards are living in the care of their parents, and their parents have control of such hazards" profoundly ignored the reality that few parents have the information available to choose lead-safe housing and many families, including those living in publicly assisted housing addressed by the HUD rule he was critiquing, may have no choice in their housing arrangements.

A group of advocates, including the Alliance, the National Center for Healthy Housing, WE ACT for Environmental Justice, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and many others, along with a number of prominent researchers and others concerned about this hire [wrote to OMB Director Peter Orszag](#) expressing our concerns. We have not yet received a response.

## Appropriations Update

On December 16, President Obama signed the act authorizing FY2010 appropriations for federal agencies including CDC, EPA, and HUD. The Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control received \$140 million, with \$20 million designated for the Healthy Homes Initiative and \$48 million for lead abatement in areas with the highest needs. This represents level funding from FY2009, but reflects an increase in funding dedicated to the Healthy Homes Initiative from \$14.6 to \$20 million. CDC's Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes Program was also level-funded again.

The Alliance has long supported increasing HUD's OHHLHC budget to at least the \$230 million a year recommended by 2000 President's Task Force, and increasing the CDC Lead-Healthy Homes effort by \$20 million to fully advance healthy homes efforts led by health departments.

## EPA Seeks to Disclose Inert Pesticide Ingredients

The EPA is [requesting public comment](#) on options for disclosing inert ingredients in pesticides. Advocates are encouraged to support full disclosure of inert ingredients in comments to EPA due by February 22.

An inert ingredient is anything added to a pesticide that does not kill or control a pest. Even though in some cases they are toxic or dangerous to humans, EPA does not currently require inerts to be identified on pesticide labels. Nearly 4,000 inerts - including several hundred that are considered hazardous under other federal rules - are used in agricultural and residential pesticides, including formaldehyde, bisphenol A, sulfuric acid, toluene, benzene and styrene. Such unidentified inert ingredients can cause cancer, reproductive problems or respiratory problems

EPA was first petitioned by environmental groups and state officials seeking public disclosure of the ingredients 11 years ago. In 2001, EPA denied those petitions filed by ten state attorney generals and an environmental coalition, and that decision was upheld by a federal judge in 2004. In 2006, the Northwest Coalition and 15 state attorney generals sent new petitions to EPA, specifically seeking the listing of 374 chemicals that are considered hazardous under other environmental laws, including the Clean Air Act. In September, EPA said that a chemical-by-chemical approach was not practical and “would potentially result in numerous challenges regarding individual products.” Instead, the agency said, it would consider requiring disclosure of all inert ingredients regardless of hazard or only those that are considered potentially hazardous. Some of the requirements may be voluntary.

Addition information and copies of the 2006 petitions are available on EPA’s website at: <http://www.epa.gov/opprd001/inerts/>. Comments may be submitted at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) referencing docket EPA–HQ–OPP–2009–0635.

## Winter Weather Brings Reminder to Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if inhaled. When power outages occur during emergencies such as winter storms, the use of alternative sources of fuel or electricity for heating or cooking can cause CO to build up in a home or garage and harm occupants. The CDC has put together a new resource page for winter weather: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/>, including information on preventing CO poisoning.

For more information on carbon monoxide, visit [http://afhh.org/hps/hps\\_carbonmonoxide.htm](http://afhh.org/hps/hps_carbonmonoxide.htm).

## Environmental Community Grants Available

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is soliciting applications for funding to reduce pollution at the local level through the Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) program. CARE is a community-based program that works with county and local governments, tribes, non-profit organizations and universities to help the public understand and reduce toxic risks from numerous sources.

EPA will award CARE cooperative agreements in two levels. Level I awards range from \$75,000 to \$100,000 and will help establish community-based partnerships to develop local environmental priorities. Level II awards, ranging from \$150,000 to \$300,000 each, will support communities that have established broad-based partnerships, have identified the priority toxic risks in the community, and are prepared to measure results, implement risk-reduction activities and become self-sustaining.

Applications for the CARE grants are due March 9, 2010. EPA will conduct three Webcasts to answer questions from prospective applicants about the application process on Feb. 2, 23, and 26 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. More information about the grants is available at <http://www.epa.gov/care>.



## Recent Research in Healthy Housing

### *Higher blood lead boosts depression, panic risk*

Lead exposure well within levels generally considered safe may harm mental health, new research suggests. Dr. Maryse F. Bouchard and her team looked at data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey for 1999-2004 on 1,987 men and women 20 to 39 years old. Those with the highest levels of lead in their blood were more than twice as likely to suffer from major depression as their peers with the lowest blood lead levels, while their risk of panic disorder was nearly five times greater, researchers found. About 7 percent met diagnostic criteria for major depression, while around 2 percent had panic disorder and another 2 percent had generalized anxiety disorder. Study participants' average blood lead level was 1.61 micrograms per deciliter of blood, and ranged from 0.3 to 37.3 micrograms per deciliter.

High levels of lead are known to interfere with the function of neurotransmitters in the brain like serotonin and dopamine, Bouchard explained, and this could be the mechanism through which lead exposure might contribute to depression and panic disorder. Read the abstract in the [Archives of General Psychiatry](#), December 2009.

### *Household pesticide exposure linked to increased risk for arthritis and lupus*

Regular or long-term exposure to consumer insecticides may increase the risk of developing autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. Previous research has suggested a link between exposure to agricultural insecticides and the development of arthritis and lupus; but in this study, scientists set out to determine if the same risks could apply to household products like bug sprays used in residential gardens or yards. It is estimated about 75% of households use some such product.

For this study, researchers at the National Institutes of Health identified more than 76,000 women between the ages of 50 to 79 who had taken part in the Women's Health Initiative Observational Study, which gathered information from generally healthy postmenopausal women. Compared to women who reported no insecticide exposure, disease risk was more than doubled in those who reported using insecticides six or more times per year and in women who had used them less frequently but over longer time period – for 20 or more years. For more information visit <http://www.arthritistoday.org/news/bug-spray-insecticide-arthritis-lupus007.php>.

## Upcoming Events

The Alliance continues to hold “Train the Trainer” courses throughout the country in order to help prepare organizations to become accredited trainers under EPA's rule. We are currently enrolling students for a class in partnership with the Healthy Homes Collaborative in Los Angeles on January 28 and 29, and a class in partnership with the NeighborWorks Training Institute in New Orleans March 1-2. Check the [Alliance's training page](#) for updated information.

The Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs (AMCHP) invites you to be a part of the 2010 Annual Conference, March 6-10, 2010, at the Gaylord National Hotel and Convention Center - National Harbor, Maryland. AMCHP is the national organization representing state public health leaders and others working to improve the health and well being of women, children and youth, including those with special healthcare needs, and families. AMCHP promotes family-centered, culturally competent, community-based systems of care for all. [Sign up today!](#)

“Lead and Beyond: Progress in Eliminating Lead Poisoning and New Opportunities for Collaboration in New Jersey” will be held at the Sheraton Edison Hotel, Raritan Center, 125 Raritan Center Parkway, Edison, NJ on April 16, 2010. The conference is sponsored by the New Jersey Interagency Task Force on the Prevention of Lead Poisoning and the Governor's Council on the Prevention of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. The deadline to register is April 2, 2010. [Click here](#) for more information.

“The Indoor Environmental Health and Technologies Conference” sponsored by the Lead and Environmental Hazards Association and “The Lead and Healthy Homes Grantees Conference” sponsored by the National Association of Lead and Healthy Homes Grantees will be held April 27 – 30, 2010, at the Astor Crowne Plaza Hotel, New Orleans, LA. There also will be some pre-conference workshops on Monday, April 26th. The joint national conference includes program tracks and technical assistance workshops dealing with lead hazard control, lead poisoning prevention and healthy home program issues. Program tracks, technical assistance workshops and consultation roundtables are offered from Tuesday afternoon through Thursday afternoon to provide in-depth education and discussion. A special “early bird” registration discount is offered until December 31. For details, visit <http://www.leadmoldconferences.com/website/conference-program-2010>.

## ALLIANCE NEWS

The Alliance would like to thank former Community Projects Director Ralph Scott for over 12 outstanding years on the Alliance staff! Ralph joined the Alliance in 1997 to help build the capacity of the Alliance, state and local advocacy organizations and national stakeholders to work collaboratively on lead poisoning prevention. Throughout his tenure, Ralph conducted countless training of trainers in lead-safe remodeling, repair and painting; lead sampling technician; and safe and healthy restoration of water-damaged homes. Additionally, he collaborated with other staff on major projects including the Community Environmental Health Resource Center, Leveraging the Federal Lead Disclosure Law, and Holding the Lead Industry Accountable. Ralph showed enormous dedication and expertise in the Alliance’s advocacy work with grassroots groups. We will miss him enormously on staff.

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