

# Georgia School Environmental Checklist

As we send our children to school, their health and safety is paramount in our minds. Schools are our children's workplaces where they spend six or more hours a day. To ensure that they are not exposed to polluted indoor air, toxic chemicals, allergens and other hazards that may lead to health and learning problems such as increased hyperactivity, asthma, and learning disabilities, walk through your school with this Checklist. Then use the RESOURCES on page two (which correspond to each question) to develop a precautionary action plan to prevent or remediate problems. Call ECO-Action (404)584-6499 for help.

## Be Safe, Not Sorry, Take Precautions Now!

**1. Is the school clean, and are carpets, floors, ceilings and air intakes free of water stains and mold?**

**Tips:** Check for unclean areas and mold and waterstains on walls, floors and ceilings. Damp areas that do not dry within 24 hours may grow mold.

**2. Do classroom windows open, and are heating, air conditioning and ventilation systems in order?**

**Tips:** Open and close classroom windows. Ask teachers if heat and airflow are satisfactory. Check airflow by holding a tissue in front of vents.

**3. Do trucks, buses and cars load or idle well away from the school?**

**Tips:** Can you smell exhaust inside the building? Look for the loading and idling areas. They should be far away from outdoor air intakes and windows. Ask your principal if the school district or state has a "No Idling" policy, if not, urge your district to adopt one.

**4. Are renovations and repairs completed?**

**Tips:** Are renovations and repairs, including roof tarring, painting, demolition and construction completed? If not, ask your principal to publicly share their plan to control dust, fumes and noise.

**5. Are cleaning products and science and art supplies free of toxic substances?**

**Tips:** Some classroom supplies, such as dry erase markers, glues and cleaning products, contain formaldehyde, solvents and other toxic chemicals. Ask to see Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), included with purchase, for product health effect. Nontoxic replacements for supplies are available, Ask the school district to adopt a non-toxic purchasing policy if there is not one.

**6. Does the school control pests and unwanted weeds without the use of pesticides?**

**Tips:** Ask the facilities manager if pesticides are used and, if so, when, where and for what pests. Are students, staff and parents notified prior to pesticide applications? Ask to see the MSDS, included with each pesticide purchase, to learn about potential health effects if exposure occurs. Recommend the adoption of safer strategies, such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

**7. Are school grounds clean, and free of air, water and soil contamination and is wooden playground equipment made of non-arsenic treated wood?**

**Tips:** See if there are neighboring sources of emissions, waste or heavy traffic, which contribute to soil, air and water pollution. To determine if the site was used for any industrial waste disposal, research the property's past use. Have the soil tested for arsenic contamination, which can come from arsenic treated (CCA) wood used in playgrounds. If equipment is made of CCA wood, ask that children be kept off the equipment until it is removed and disposed of properly.

**8. Are steps taken to prevent food-borne illnesses?**

**Tips:** Observe the kitchen prep area. Are floors and surfaces clean? Are refrigerators at or below 40 degrees, foods covered, and raw meat stored separately from other foods? Ask the school administration if they have a plan to prevent illnesses that includes educating food handlers on the serious risks food-borne illnesses poses to children, and emergency notification in the case of suspected outbreak.

**9. Are drinking water and building paints lead free?**

**Tips:** In May 2004, the EPA strongly recommended testing drinking water for lead contamination. Ask your principal if drinking water has been tested. Ask to see the results. Paint dust or flakes found on windowsills, carpets, and soil from pre-1980 buildings are assumed to be lead-based. Lead poisoning has been proven to cause a variety of serious health problems, including mental retardation and aggressive behaviors, and now has been linked to schizophrenia.

**10. Is the school fully accessible to all students and staff with asthma, environmental, learning, developmental and physical disabilities?**

**Tips:** Federal laws require schools to have accessible facilities. Conditions that exacerbate asthma, such as poor indoor air quality, inhibit teacher and student performance, and may hinder their ability to attend school. Ask about your school's absenteeism rate compared to other schools.

**If you answered "Yes" to all of these questions, thank your school board at the next board meeting, and send a letter to the local paper! If one or more resulted in a "No," choose one or two issues to work on initially, use the resources provided, and develop a precautionary action plan.**

# RESOURCES & REFERENCES

## Addressing environmental hazards:

Many parents, teachers, and health and scientific experts are worried about the trend toward an increase in some childhood diseases, such as asthma and cancer. Studies show chemicals in our environment such as pesticides and chemicals in products contribute to these alarming statistics.

**We can heed early warning signs, and prevent toxic exposures by taking a precautionary approach.**

### What can you do?

- √ Use the school environmental checklist and do a “walk through” inspection of your school.
- √ Raise the issue with your PTA or another school parent group. If there is no local PTA school unit or parent association, create one! Contact **GA PTA** for help 404-659-0214.
- √ See if your school has a committee and a plan to address environmental problems. If not, contact a group below for assistance.
- √ Sign on to the *BE SAFE Precautionary Platform*. Help send a message to the White House to support a precautionary approach to protect children’s health. **BE SAFE:** [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com), 703-237-2249
- √ Sign on to the *Coalition for Healthier Schools Position Statement* to support national, state and local policies that protect children’s health. **Coalition for Healthier Schools:** [www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org), 518-462-0632

### For more information and getting help in Georgia:

- √ Toxic chemical exposure and human health, video screenings, community organizing, and information on taking “precautionary action”, **ECO-Action**, [www.eco-act.org](http://www.eco-act.org) 404-584-6499
- √ School Health & Safety issues, Education Legislative Issues, **GA PTA**, [www.georgiapta.org](http://www.georgiapta.org) 404-659-0214

### Checklist References:

1. **Mold-- United States Environmental Protection Agency**, [www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldresources.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldresources.html); **Heart Lung & Blood Institute**, *How Asthma-Friendly Is Your School?* [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/asthma/friendhi.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/asthma/friendhi.htm); **Environmental Health Section**, Georgia Division of Public Health, 404-657-6534
2. **School Ventilation-- Healthy Schools Network:** *School Health and Safety Committees: How to Promote Child and Adult Environmental Health Protection*, [www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org), 518-462-0632. **Environmental Protection Agency:** *Tools For Schools*, <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools>
3. **Bus Idling—In Georgia**, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, [www.cleanenergy.org](http://www.cleanenergy.org) **Environmental Protection Agency:** [www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus](http://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus)
4. **Renovations & Repairs-- Center for Health, Environment & Justice:** [www.chej.org](http://www.chej.org) 703-237-2249; **Healthy Schools Network:** [www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org), 518-462-0632.
5. **Products & Supplies-- Center for Health, Environment & Justice:** *Green Flag Schools Program*, 703-237-2249, [www.greenflagschools.org](http://www.greenflagschools.org); **Healthy Schools Network:** *Healthier Cleaning and Maintenance: Practice & Products for Schools*, [www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org), 518-462-0632. **Oregon Toxics Alliance:** 541-465-8860, [www.oregontoxics.org/kidstoxics.html](http://www.oregontoxics.org/kidstoxics.html)
6. **Pesticides-- Beyond Pesticides:** [www.beyondpesticides.org/states](http://www.beyondpesticides.org/states), 202-543-5450. **California Safe Schools:** Los Angeles Unified Integrated Pest Management Policy, a national model as the first IPM Policy to embrace the precautionary principle, [www.calisafe.org/policy.htm](http://www.calisafe.org/policy.htm)
7. **School Grounds-- Center for Health, Environment & Justice**, *Green Flag Schools Program*, 703-237-2249 [www.greenflagschools.org](http://www.greenflagschools.org) **Massachusetts Healthy Schools Network c/o Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health**, [www.masscosh.org/healthyschoolsnews3.htm](http://www.masscosh.org/healthyschoolsnews3.htm), 617-825-SAFE; In Georgia, **ECO-Action**, [www.eco-act.org](http://www.eco-act.org), 404-584-6499
8. **Food-- Safe Tables Our Priority**, (S.T.O.P.): *School Food Safety Initiative*, [www.safetables.org](http://www.safetables.org) 802-863-0555; **Partnership for Food Safety Education:** <http://www.fightbac.org/main.cfm>
9. **Lead-- Environmental Protection Agency:** *Consumer Advisory*, [www.epa.gov/safewater/lead/schoolanddccc.htm](http://www.epa.gov/safewater/lead/schoolanddccc.htm), 800-426-4791, **Lead Service Line Water Testing**, 202-787-2732. **Learning Disabilities Association of America:** [www.healthychildrenproject.org](http://www.healthychildrenproject.org)
10. **Accessibility--Healthy Kids:** *The Key to Basics*, [www.healthy-kids.info](http://www.healthy-kids.info) 617-965-9637. “Protecting Vulnerable Students in Sick Schools” by *Ellie Goldberg*, **Healthy Schools Network**, [www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org), 518-482-0632.