



Hot Air from EEOP – A Newsletter

Environmental Education Outreach Program (EEOP)
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The Newsletter

This newsletter is a service of the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals (ITEP) Environmental Education Outreach Program (EEOP). The EEOP staff created this newsletter for K-16 students, educators, and tribal professionals that are interested in learning more about environmental issues with an emphasis on air quality. This issue of the newsletter will focus on environmental tobacco smoke and air toxics found in building materials. Additional articles are provided on a wood-smoke project at Nez Perce and some advice for students preparing for a future career.

Smoking

The editor of this newsletter admits being a little biased about smoking, nevertheless two recent news articles were interesting. The Sheraton Hotels announced that they were going smokeless at 300 more hotels throughout the United States, Caribbean, and Canada. In a separate announcement, the Swissotel Chicago announced that they will pay their staff a bounty for reporting on guests that are breaking the non-smoking rules.

These announcements and policies demonstrate a big change in attitudes towards smoking. Thirty years ago smokers dominated and were allowed to smoke almost anywhere. As a lieutenant in the US Army I announced there would be no smoking in our platoon meetings. A private lit up his cigarette in defiance of this directive. I reached up, grabbed the cigarette, crushed it, and threw it on the ground. I was wearing gloves, but even so, the soldiers were impressed. The private apparently thought I was going to hit him. There were no more discussions about smoking in platoon meetings. As a company commander I announced a no smoking policy for the public areas in the dorms. Several soldiers attempted to protest the new policy, but much to their surprise found out that there was an army policy about smoking in public places – the policy had just be ignored in the past. In the early 80s it was usual for non-smokers to attempt to defend their rights. Today, smokers are facing more and more restrictions. The reasons for the new policies are based on clear scientific research confirming the serious problems with smoking. In previous articles I have discussed the health issues, however the hotels are basing their decisions on dollars. Smokers cost hotels a lot of money.

A manager at Swissotel explained, “One person having one cigarette is really a big deal. It costs about \$500 to thoroughly clean a room, which includes washing walls and sending drapes, sheers, blankets, dust ruffles, pillow shams, duvets and covers out for dry cleaning and scouring the carpet. Additionally, a room is out of service for two days or more during cleaning.”

As an asthmatic that is sensitive to cigarette smoke, I can verify that it doesn't take much to contaminate a room. Once I stayed in a hotel that had "converted" to a non-smoking hotel, but as I found out later, had not done the thorough cleaning described by the Swissotel manager. Even though the change had been made months earlier, I was sick within minutes of entering a previous smoking room. Upon confronting the front desk, they admitted that the room was an old smoking room and reassigned me to another room. I also find it difficult to stay in a hotel that allows smoking anywhere in the building. Smoke travels through the building, contaminating the entire building. In my current job, I stay in a lot of hotels. At times, it is very difficult to protect my health. Increased exposures to cigarette smoke means that I have to take more medications and that I will still feel bad.

Smoking is an important economic and health issue. The EEOP staff continues to discourage smoking in public places. Smokers must stay away from children while they smoke. Exposure to cigarette smoke is possibly one of the causes of asthma. Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) is definitely an asthma trigger. Additionally, recent evidence clearly shows that there is no safe level of exposure for young children.

If you have questions about environmental or health issues associated with smoking, contact the EEOP staff.

Toxic Trailers

Katrina helped highlight many deficiencies for FEMA. Unfortunately, FEMA's problems are not over. Recently over 38,000 families had to be relocated because of health concerns about the government issued trailers provided as temporary homes. The government issued trailers turned out to be toxic. The revelation came after months of congressional hearings and allegations by whistle-blowers that FEMA suppressed evidence of the formaldehyde fumes. Testing of 519 trailers revealed that a third had unacceptably high levels of formaldehyde. Residents complained about respiratory and sinus problems from their FEMA trailers almost immediately after the agency began distributing the trailers after Katrina. There is a little bit of good news to go with the bad. A FEMA manager said, "FEMA will never again use trailers to house hurricane and other disaster victims. Mobile homes, which are designed for long-term use, will be used instead."

Unfortunately, the EEOP staff has found some schools that have problems similar to the toxic trailers. A new school building full of pressed wood products, shelving, and without proper ventilation, triggered an asthma attack for the editor, a biological air quality meter, within minutes.

Formaldehyde is an important chemical used widely by industry to manufacture building materials and numerous household products. It is also a by-product of combustion and certain other natural processes. Formaldehyde may be present in substantial concentrations both indoors and outdoors. The rate at which products like pressed wood or textiles release formaldehyde depend on the age of the product, the indoor temperatures and humidity. Pressed wood products (hardwood plywood wall paneling, particleboard, fiberboard) and furniture made with these pressed wood products can contain significant amounts of formaldehyde. Combustion sources, environmental tobacco smoke, textiles, and glues can also contact formaldehyde.

Formaldehyde, a colorless, pungent-smelling gas, can cause watery eyes, burning sensations in the eyes and throat, nausea, and difficulty in breathing in some humans exposed at elevated

levels (above 0.1 parts per million). Higher concentrations may trigger attacks in people with asthma. There is also evidence that some people can develop sensitivity to formaldehyde, which has also been shown to cause cancer in animals and may cause cancer in humans. Formaldehyde may cause permanent damage to the liver and other internal organs.

Steps to Reduce Exposure:

- Use "exterior-grade" pressed wood products.
- Use air conditioning and dehumidifiers to maintain moderate temperature and reduce humidity levels.
- Increase ventilation.
- Seek furniture and building materials with low formaldehyde ratings.

If you have concerns about the air quality in your school, please contact the EEOP staff. We are interested in helping teachers and students do an IAQ Building Assessment. This program is non-regulatory, but may help create a better learning environment in your school.

The Internet and Your Future Career

Employers are including an Internet search as part of your reference check. A Google search will reveal your web-pages on Facebook, MySpace, and other places. Jennifer Kushell, president of ysn.com, tells the story of a candidate who applied for work at her company. A Google search found her blog, which blared out the tune "Crazy Bitch" and went into specific and explicit detail about what she thought about her current crazy employer.

"It was mind-blowing that a human being would talk about her employer that way, never mind post it online for all to see. Needless to say, that person was not hired," said Kushell.

Your image on Facebook or MySpace can create a negative image that turns off prospective employers. On the other hand, used wisely, a website can create a positive image for your future boss. Facebook, MySpace and your blog will not be a Trojan Horse that wrecks your job hunting, if you use them in the right way.

If you have any questions about preparing for your future career, contact the EEOP staff.

Nez Perce Wood story

Future Issues

We are interested in articles sharing stories from students, teachers, or tribal professionals influenced by ITEP or EEOP activities. If you would like to be published in our newsletter, send Mansel your proposed article.

Credits and Contacts

The US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Office of Air and Radiation provides part of the funding to make this newsletter possible. The newsletter is disseminated on various list serves, however, if you would like to join the newsletter list serve, contact Mansel.

Our staff looks forward to providing new services and developing new programs, as well as continuing existing programs. We especially look forward to hearing from you. So please visit our website at <http://www.nau.edu/eeop> or contact us via telephone or email.

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