



Initiative on Children's Environmental Health

[of the Collaborative on Health and the Environment](#)



Biweekly Bulletin December 29, 2010

This bulletin lists upcoming events plus recent announcements, news and journal articles, calls for proposals and other items related to children's environmental health. They are archived and searchable on our website:

http://www.healthandenvironment.org/working_groups/childrens_health/bulletins.

ICEH Highlights

[Environmental Health Training for Moms.](#)

The Collaborative on Health and the Environment, in partnership with MOMS (Making Our Milk Safe), is providing a training March 2 - 4, 2011, to teach mothers about environmental health science. The goal is to provide a basic scientific understanding so that mothers can be more confident and active as advocates for a healthier world. This training will address some basic things people can do in their everyday lives to avoid chemical exposure, but will primarily focus on evidence-based science in lay language that you can use for advocacy. Acceptance into the training is based, in part, on a commitment to apply what you learn to social change. The training is free, and travel scholarships may be available. Priority consideration given to applications received by January 15, 2011.

Announcements

A daily news feed with articles and announcements is available on CHE's website:

<http://www.healthandenvironment.org/news/announce>.

[EPA improves guidance for compact fluorescent light bulbs cleanup.](#)

The guidance and brochure will provide simple, user friendly directions to help prevent and reduce exposure to people from mercury pollution.

[EPA delivers 15 years of acid rain reductions.](#)

EPA's Acid Rain Program has earned widespread acclaim due to dramatic sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emission reductions that are saving American lives and ecosystems. An analysis estimates annual public health benefits of the program in 2010 alone at more than \$120 billion, about 40 times the estimated cost.

[EPA seeks public comment on Policy for Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribes.](#)

The goals of the policy are to involve tribal officials when EPA is taking actions or implementing decisions that may affect tribes. Comments must be received on or before February 16, 2011.

[Obama administration convenes environmental leaders at historic White House environmental justice forum featuring five cabinet secretaries.](#)

Five Cabinet secretaries and senior officials from a wide range of federal agencies and offices participated in the first White House Forum on Environmental Justice today.

[See a related announcement: [EPA announces 2010 Achievements in Environmental Justice](#)]

[Pesticide news story: EPA solicits comments on petition regarding antimicrobial pesticide triclosan.](#)

EPA is publishing in the Federal Register a petition from Beyond Pesticides and Food and Water Watch requesting a ban on the antimicrobial pesticide triclosan. Comments will be accepted until February 7, 2011.

[EPA removes saccharin from hazardous substances listing](#)

In the late 1990s, the National Toxicology Program and the International Agency for Research on Cancer re-evaluated the available scientific information on saccharin and its salts and concluded that it is not a potential human carcinogen.

[Job opening: Washington, DC.](#)

The Pew Health Group (PHG) seeks a Manager, Communications, Food Additives Project to handle the preparation, review and publication of at least six technical reports. The candidate search closes February 15, 2011.

[Job opening: Oakland area, California.](#)

Californians for a Healthy and Green Economy (CHANGE) is seeking an experienced policy coordinator, who may also be able to perform the role of campaign director, to represent CHANGE in Sacramento and support CHANGE's campaigns and member organizations. Please send a cover letter and resume to CHANGEcalifornia.jobs@gmail.com. The deadline to apply is Friday January 7, 2011. Please specify policy coordinator/campaign director in your subject line.

Upcoming Events

Online Calendar. These and more upcoming events, including requests for proposals and abstracts, are listed in a searchable calendar:
<http://www.healthandenvironment.org/cgi-bin/searchevents.cgi>

1) National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures Web Dialogue
Wednesday and Thursday, January 5 - 6, 2011

Sponsor: US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registration, and RESOLVE, in collaboration with the American Public Health Association, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, and the National Association of County and City Health Officials

Since its launch in June 2009, the National Conversation has engaged a broad range of groups and individuals like you to propose actions needed to protect the public from harmful chemical exposures. A copy of the draft Action Agenda will be posted on December 20th. A key component of the month-long comment period, the 2nd National Conversation WebDialogue is an additional opportunity to have your voice heard and to share input as part of the public comment process.

Price: free

[Visit the website](#)

2) Adding Value Through Green Chemistry

Friday January 7, 2011

8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

at the Cowles Auditorium, University of Minnesota, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

Sponsor: The Minnesota Green Chemistry Forum, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and University of Minnesota: Center for Sustainable Polymers; Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, Center for Science, Technology and Public Policy; and Institute on the Environment

Join Minnesota's business, NGO, policy and academic leaders in exploring the benefits of green chemistry for businesses, our economy, public health and the environment. The conference goals are to 1) bring businesses of all sizes together with policymakers, academics and NGOs to network and discuss opportunities in the field of green chemistry; 2) highlight opportunities in green chemistry for businesses, for Minnesota's economy, and for protecting public health and the environment; and 3) identify concrete actions to promote green chemistry in our state through investment, research, education, business practices and supportive policies.

Price: \$50 (includes snacks and lunch) through December 15th or \$70 after

[Visit the website](#)

Contact: IATP, 612-870-0453

3) Atmospheric Toxics Webinar Series

Tuesday January 11, 2011

10:00 a.m. - noon Eastern time

Sponsor: Great Lakes Commission

Over the last six years, the Great Lakes Commission (GLC), under funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and in cooperation with the eight Great Lakes states, has awarded research grants dealing with atmospheric toxic pollutants affecting the Great Lakes and their tributary watersheds. Thirty-five research grants have been awarded since 2004 addressing a diverse array of research concerning atmospheric pollutant loadings and movement within the basin and the associated impacts of numerous persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic (PBT) chemicals on wildlife and human health. A substantial amount of new scientific knowledge has been attained through these research activities. The GLAD webinar series is intended to provide a forum for GLAD Principal Investigators (PIs) to disseminate information on their respective research activities, including specific findings, recommended follow-up actions, and potential public policy actions to foster elimination of PBT threats to the region. The presenters and topics will be listed on the website.

Price: free

[Visit the website](#)

Contact: GLC, 734-971-9135

4) Impacts of Endocrine Disruptor Chemicals on Human Health and the Aquatic Environment

Tuesday January 11, 2011

2:00 - 3:00 p.m. Eastern time

Sponsor: American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
Environmental Health Initiative

In this webinar, part of AAIDD Environmental Health Initiative's Research and Science Teleconference Series, Frances Solomon, PhD, will speak. Organic chemicals are discharged to water, air and soil from various human activities, and have the ability to biomagnify in food webs and persist in fatty tissues of organisms. Many of these chemicals are found in everyday household products and have toxic effects from the molecular to the organism to the ecosystem level, including endocrine disruption. Endocrine disruption effects are fascinating, alarming and far-reaching. This webinar will be an overview of persistent organic pollutants that are endocrine disruptor chemicals (EDCs). These chemicals of emerging concern include pesticides, polychlorinated biphenyls, polybrominated diphenyl ethers, bisphenol A, phthalates, and perfluorinated compounds. The webinar will begin with a description of the sources, properties, and mechanism of action of EDCs and exposure pathways. We will then focus on the impacts of specific EDCs and mixtures of EDCs, primarily on humans, with some examples drawn from the aquatic environment, e.g., impacts on brain development, reproductive health, carbohydrate metabolism and body weight, and links between EDCs and certain types of

cancer in humans. The webinar will conclude with a discussion of regulatory reform and individual actions that can be taken to reduce exposure to EDCs.

Price: free

[Visit the website](#)

Contact: Laura Abulafia, laura@aaidd.org

5) IAQ Tools for Schools National Symposium

Thursday through Saturday, January 13 - 15, 2011

Washington, DC

at the Grand Hyatt

Sponsor: US Environmental Protection Agency

The IAQ Tools for Schools Program is a nationwide initiative to help school officials assess, resolve, and prevent IAQ problems, and to reduce exposure to asthma triggers in school facilities. While school officials, administrators, facilities and operations personnel, teachers, school nurses, parents, and students traditionally attend, the Symposium is open to anyone with an interest in IAQ in schools.

Price: \$375

[Visit the website](#)

6) Partnership Call: Cumulative Impacts and Environmental Justice: A conversation with Manuel Pastor

Tuesday January 18, 2011

10:00 a.m. Pacific / 1:00 p.m. Eastern time

Sponsor: Collaborative on Health and the Environment

Given racial discrimination continues to be one of the strongest currents undermining the health and well-being of countless communities around the country, CHE is privileged to host a conversation with Manuel Pastor, PhD, professor of Geography and American Studies & Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, on this call. Dr. Pastor's groundbreaking research has generally focused on issues of environmental justice, regional inclusion and the economic and social conditions facing low-income urban communities. He has co-authored *Uncommon Common Ground: Race and America's Future* (2010) and *Searching for the Uncommon Common Ground: New Dimensions on Race in America* (2002), and authored numerous other influential publications and articles.

Price: free

[Visit the website](#)

Contact: CHE, info@healthandenvironment.org

7) What Healthy Communities Need from their Transportation Networks

Tuesday January 18, 2011

2:00 p.m. Eastern time

Sponsor: American Public Health Association

Transportation decisions affect our individual lives, economy and health. All communities use highways, streets, sidewalks and trails to get to work or school, to get medical care, to access healthy foods and recreation and to participate in countless other activities every day. However, many communities are negatively impacted by transportation decisions that are detrimental to health. Through a diversity of expert speakers, this innovative, four-part webinar series explores the intersections between health and transportation, highlighting state and local programs that leverage opportunities in transportation that benefit health, and explains what the future may hold for the federal surface transportation authorization. This is the first of four webinars in a series.

Price: free

[Visit the website](#)

Contact: Eloisa Raynault, eloisa.raynault@apha.org

8) 2011 US EPA Benefits of Environmental Information Disclosure Meeting

Tuesday January 18, 2011

Crystal City, Virginia

at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City

Sponsor: US Environmental Protection Agency

EPA's National Center for Environmental Economics (NCEE), in cooperation with the National Center for Environmental Research, is sponsoring a workshop "Benefits of Environmental Information Disclosure." The meeting will consist of a series of presentations by researchers from EPA's Science to Achieve Results (STAR) grant program, NCEE, other EPA offices, and universities on the use of information disclosure mechanisms to achieve clean air, water quality, land use, and other environmental goals. Specific papers will be on the Toxics Release Inventory, energy efficiency labels, and the interaction of enforcement and information. The meeting is open to all who are interested in and want to learn more about this research area.

Price: free

[Visit the website](#)

Contact: William Wheeler, 202-566-2264 or wheeler.william@epa.gov

9) Health and Wellness Conference 2011

Thursday through Saturday, January 20 - 22, 2011

Berkeley, California

at the Clark Kerr Conference Center and Great Hall, University of California Berkeley

Sponsor: The International Journal of Health, Wellness and Society

The 2011 Health, Wellness and Society Conference will address a range of critically important issues and themes relating to Health, Wellness and Society. Plenary speakers include some of the leading thinkers in these areas, as well as numerous paper, colloquium and workshop presentations.

Price: see the [Registration page](#)

[Visit the website](#)

News and Journal Articles

[Newborns with low vitamin D levels at increased risk for respiratory infections.](#)

Tuesday, December 28, 2010

The vitamin D levels of newborn babies appear to predict their risk of respiratory infections during infancy and the occurrence of wheezing during early childhood, but not the risk of developing asthma. Physorg.com.

[Peru Amazon Natives win key victory against big oil.](#)

Monday, December 27, 2010

Amazon Natives of the Achuar tribe have won a significant victory to get oil companies such as California's Occidental Petroleum to better care for the Amazon rainforest and compensate Natives for pollution. Indian Country Today.

[See a related article: [Southeast Asian immigrants flounder after Gulf spill](#)]

[Climate change effects vary widely between rich and poor countries.](#)

Monday, December 27, 2010

A new report portrays the striking disparities now, and those expected by 2030, between wealthy and less-affluent nations in damage and deaths from the rise of climate-

sensitive diseases and extreme weather events, as well as from habitat loss and economic costs. Contra Costa Times, California.

[See a related article: [On the move in a warming world: The rise of climate refugees](#)]

Cohen's nonprofit helps hospitals go green.

Monday, December 27, 2010

When the EPA released a draft report in the mid-1990s, citing hospital incinerators as the country's No. 1 source of carcinogenic dioxin emissions, Gary Cohen, a longtime environmental activist, simply couldn't abide the irony. How could the industry that existed to heal people be doing so much harm? Miller-McCune.

Flu crisis hits cancer surgery: Hospitals struggle to cope as deaths rise and Britain teeters on the brink of an epidemic.

Monday, December 27, 2010

Vital cancer operations are being cancelled as hospitals struggle to cope with soaring numbers of flu victims. Experts predict that Britain is on course for the first flu epidemic in over a decade after the number of cases more than doubled in the past week. London Daily Mail, United Kingdom.

MDI Bio Lab awarded \$1.28M for research.

Saturday, December 25, 2010

A new federal grant of more than \$1 million awarded to the Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory will help biomedical researchers keep track of how chemicals in the environment might affect human health, lab officials indicated in a statement released Wednesday. Bangor Daily News.

[See a related article: [U-M gets \\$1.4M for grant on prenatal chemicals](#)]

Fortunately, they don't build 'em like they used to.

Saturday, December 25, 2010

As our awareness of hazardous building materials improved, we began to create products that didn't incorporate dangerous materials such as formaldehyde, asbestos and volatile organic compounds. The products used today are safer and therefore our homes are much better and healthier. Associated Press.

[See another article about chemicals in homes: [Homeowners aim to clear the air](#)]

EPA provides public with easier access to chemical information.

Thursday, December 23, 2010

The chemical data access tool allows users to conduct a chemical-specific search for health and safety studies that have been submitted to the agency under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA).

[See related announcements and articles: [Risky business: EPA builds list of potentially dangerous chemicals](#) and [Research suggests chemicals that hurt lab rats may also hurt us](#)]

WHO to set up global database of traditional medicines.

Wednesday, December 22, 2010

The database aims to enable the objective evaluation of the benefits of traditional medicines using the same criteria for all countries, allowing researchers and policymakers to monitor their safety and efficacy. SciDev.net.

Serum fluoride level and children's intelligence quotient in two villages in China.

Tuesday, December 21, 2010

The results indicated that fluoride in drinking water was highly correlated with serum fluoride, and higher fluoride exposure may affect intelligence among children. Environmental Health Perspectives.

Study finds food in early life affects fertility.

Tuesday, December 21, 2010

The reproductive success of men and women is influenced by the food they receive at an early stage in life, according to new research by the University of Sheffield. Physorg.com.

[See other articles about food and health: [Dairy foods 'could help prevent diabetes'](#); [Eating healthier means living longer](#); [You are what your father ate, too: Paternal diet affects lipid metabolizing genes in offspring, research suggests](#) and [Healthier hospital food -- for us and the earth](#)]

[Effort aims for easier lead testing in children.](#)

Tuesday, December 21, 2010

Medical authorities in Western New York said this week that lead levels should be a concern for parents of young children all the time -- not just at the holidays. And, they said, there is a new effort under way in pediatricians' offices to make lead-testing for children quick, easy and convenient. Buffalo News, New York.

[See another article and an announcement about lead: [Lead polluter ordered to pay B36m compensation](#) and [EPA expands air monitoring network to protect children from lead](#)]

[EPA to inspect city classrooms for PCBs.](#)

Tuesday, December 21, 2010

In an escalating dispute with New York City education officials, federal authorities say they will soon begin inspecting classrooms for PCB contamination because the city is downplaying the potential danger to children. Wall Street Journal.

[Asbestos test under fire in Japan.](#)

Monday, December 20, 2010

Health experts estimate that more than 100,000 people in Japan will die of mesothelioma and other asbestos-related diseases by 2040 and some believe the death toll will be even higher because the method Japanese authorities use to analyze materials for asbestos has been deemed unreliable by scientists around the world. Center for Public Integrity.

[See another article about asbestos: [Plans to reopen world's largest asbestos mine will create 'new generation' of victims](#)]

[Probable carcinogen hexavalent chromium found in drinking water of 31 U.S. cities.](#)

Sunday, December 19, 2010

An environmental group that analyzed the drinking water in 35 cities across the United States, including Bethesda and Washington, found that most contained hexavalent chromium, a probable carcinogen that was made famous by the film "Erin Brockovich." Washington Post.

[See a related announcement: [EPA statement on chromium-6 in drinking water](#) and other articles about water contamination: [How leaks affect you](#); [Draft of federal report finds radiation widespread in Houston water](#); [SCSU scientist eyes chemicals' impact on state lakes](#); [Wyo. natural gas fracking rules point the way for public disclosure of chemicals used](#) and [Toxins in city ground water alarming](#)]

[Mobile phone masts linked to mysterious spikes in births.](#)

Sunday, December 19, 2010

Do mobile phone towers make people more likely to procreate? Could it be possible that mobile phone radiation somehow aids fertilisation, or maybe there's just something romantic about a mobile phone transmitter mast protruding from the landscape? London Guardian, United Kingdom.

[See another article about phone masts: [Telecom masts pose no danger to Ghanaians -- Radiologist](#)]

[Ski wax chemicals build up in people's blood, pose risks.](#)

Sunday, December 19, 2010

Ski wax can expose users to perfluorochemicals that build up in their bodies and carry potentially serious health risks. Racers, in particular, covet waxes with high amounts of fluorinated compounds because they make skis and snowboards go faster. But that extra speed could come at a cost. Environmental Health News.

[See another article about hazards from consumer products: [American-made drywall](#)]

[emerges as potential danger\]](#)

[EPA and European Chemicals Agency sign agreement to enhance chemical safety.](#)

Saturday, December 18, 2010

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) have announced a partnership that will promote enhanced technical cooperation on chemical management activities.

[See other announcements and articles regarding regulation of toxic chemicals: [EPA sets first national standard to reduce mercury emissions from gold production](#); [EPA analysis shows reduction in 2009 toxic chemical releases](#); [California to rewrite toxic-chemical regulations](#); [A chemical conundrum: How dangerous is dioxin?](#) and [Denmark cancels shipments of toxic chemical waste from Australia](#)]

[Decades after childhood radiation, thyroid cancer a concern.](#)

Friday, December 17, 2010

When children are exposed to head and neck radiation, whether due to cancer treatment or multiple diagnostic CT scans, the result is an increased risk of thyroid cancer for the next 58 years or longer, according to University of Rochester Medical Center research. PhysOrg.com.

[See another article about radiation: [Forty years later, Nagasaki bomb still causes disease](#)]

[Supplements and sunlight give optimal protection from breast cancer: Study.](#)

Friday, December 17, 2010

Some sun exposure and vitamin D supplements may be the most effective means of reducing the risk of breast cancer, suggest findings from a French study.

NutraIngredients-usa.com.

[See a related article: [Olive oil protects against breast cancer: study](#) and another article about cancer: [Many ignore indoor tanning risks](#)]

[Researchers have advice on regulating microscopic pesticides](#)

Friday, December 17, 2010

As we wait on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to decide what to do about nanosilver, American and European researchers have outlined several suggestions for making nanotechnology-based pesticides safer. New Haven Independent, Connecticut.

[See other articles about pesticides: [State of endosulfan](#); [Fields of tears](#); [Treating bedbugs isn't a do-it-yourself project](#); [Salinas, California: The salad bowl of pesticides](#); [Can methyl iodide be used as a pesticide?](#) and [Toxic culture leads to destruction of ecosystem: Vandana Shiva](#)]

[Asthma hits state's poor the hardest.](#)

Friday, December 17, 2010

Asthma is on the rise in California, and the low-income tend to bear the greatest burden from the condition, according to a report by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. California Watch.

[See a related article: [Puerto Rico baffled by high asthma rate](#)]

[Proximity to freeways increases autism risk, study finds.](#)

Friday, December 17, 2010

Children born to mothers who live close to freeways have twice the risk of autism, researchers reported Thursday. The study, its authors say, adds to evidence suggesting that certain environmental exposures could play a role in causing the disorder in some children. Los Angeles Times, California.

[See other articles about air quality: [Environmentalists sue ExxonMobil over air laws](#); [Wind and terrain play a role in 'transport' pollution](#); [Kan. approves air permit for controversial Sunflower coal-fired power plant](#); ['One of the worst' areas](#); [Calif. to give industry more time for diesel rules](#); [The use of alternative pollutant metrics in time-series studies of ambient air pollution and respiratory emergency department visits](#); [Personal exposure to ultrafine particles](#); [Busy roads drive rise in kids' leukemia risk](#); [Air pollution 'shortens lives of 200,000 people'](#); [Metro Detroit air is cleaner](#); [Tougher](#)

[regulations adopted for outdoor wood boilers; Down economy helps reduce air pollution and Air pollution: mechanisms of neuroinflammation and CNS disease\]](#)

State bans BPA in baby bottles, cups.

Thursday, December 16, 2010

State health officials voted yesterday to ban bisphenol A in the production of baby bottles and sippy cups, but activists say the decision fails to protect infants from the chemical's use in food and formula packaging. Framingham MetroWest Daily News, Massachusetts.

[See another article about BPA: [Study: BPA exposure may reduce chances of IVF](#)]

A new reason to worry.

Thursday, December 16, 2010

Because there is no regulatory testing for these chemicals, it's difficult to know how much of the nation's food supply might be contaminated at high levels. Newsweek.

[See other articles about contaminants in food: [Iowa OKs fish deemed risky by feds, neighboring states](#); [Snacks spark cancer scare](#); [Conserve water to reduce arsenic in rice](#); [Safety of Gulf seafood debated 8 months after BP oil spill](#); [CDC says 15-state salmonella outbreak linked to alfalfa sprouts](#) and [EU blocks Uruguayan squid shipment because of high cadmium content](#)]

A debate over disposal.

Thursday, December 16, 2010

Coal waste, 400 feet deep and even deeper, covers about 1,000 acres on a site that is 2 square miles. As one of the nation's largest coal-waste disposal sites, Little Blue is a centerpiece of a nationwide debate about the safety of such impoundments and whether fly ash should be designated as hazardous waste. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Pennsylvania.

[See other articles about coal ash disposal: [Henrico panel denies landfill permit for coal ash](#) and [2 years after ash spill, TVA denying health harm](#)]

Oilsands not boosting cancer levels: scientists.

Wednesday, December 15, 2010

The Royal Society of Canada found 'no credible evidence' that contaminants from the oilsands are boosting cancer levels in downstream communities. CBC Canada.

[See related articles: [Oil sands report criticizes all stakeholders](#) and [Ottawa kept in dark on abnormal fish found in oil-sands rivers](#)]

Smoking bans may benefit kids with asthma.

Wednesday, December 15, 2010

Children with asthma who live in areas with "smoke-free" laws may suffer fewer bouts of coughing and wheezing as a result, a new study suggests. Reuters Health.

[See related articles: [Report finds dramatic changes in bars, restaurants after smoking ban](#); [Spain says 'Adios' to smoky bars, cafes, eateries](#); [Beijing hopes to stub out smoking](#) and [Government spends £250m on free nicotine patches for ALL smokers in New Year](#)]

Lessons Learned

What You Don't Know Can Be Harmful - Women And Radium

by Steven G. Gilbert, PhD, DABT

"Not to worry," their bosses told them. "If you swallow any radium, it'll make your cheeks rosy." The women at Radium Dial sometimes painted their teeth and faces and then turned off the lights for a laugh.

From: *Radium Girls* By Martha Irvine, Associated Press, Buffalo News, 1998

Marie Curie and her husband announced the discovery of radium on December 26, 1898. They separated radium, with symbol Ra and atomic number 88, from uranium ore called

pitchblende. The most common isotope, Radium-226, emits alpha particles; with a half-life of about 1600 years, it eventually becomes lead. One of the decay products is radon gas, which can contaminate homes depending on soil type. Alpha particles are of low energy and are easily blocked but can cause harm if a material like radium is ingested and sits next to a cell's DNA. Radium is highly radioactive and also emits beta and gamma particles, which have higher energy and cause greater harm. Marie Curie was thought to have died from cancer in part from her exposure to radium.



Marie Curie

Once discovered, radioactivity fascinated people. Because it glows in the dark, radium seemed ideal for watches and dials. In the early 1900s, young women were employed to paint radium, usually mixed with phosphor, on watch dials. They would point their brushes by placing the tip between their lips and thus ingesting a small amount of radium. Because radium substitutes for calcium (as does lead), it was incorporated into bone. Over time this weakened the bone and caused bone cancer, usually leading to painful death, often at a very young age. The company owners and managers denied that any harm was caused by radium even while protecting themselves from radium exposure. Medical professionals were urged to attribute worker deaths to other causes with accusations of syphilis often cited in attempts to smear the reputations of the women. In the 1920s, a group of these women, the so-called "Radium Girls", sued the US Radium Corporation, a military contractor. Some of the victims won a small portion of money, thus becoming the first to receive compensation for occupational injury.

The "Radium Girls" case was extremely important as it established the right of individual workers to sue for damages from corporations due to labor abuse. The result was improved industrial safety standards and ultimately increased federal regulation. Their story was told in a powerful play entitled "Radium Girls" by D.W. Gregory.



Radium Girls at work

While we now know much more about the health effects of radiation, there is still controversy about the low-level effects of radiation. Scientific research and policy that prevents exposure to harmful substances are necessary for an environment in which we can all reach and maintain our full potential in whatever job we do.

Radium Girls at Toxipedia: <http://toxipedia.org/x/-w4>

A Small Dose of Radiation at Toxipedia: <http://toxipedia.org/x/IgE>

Looking back to go forward

Lessons Learned is a bulletin feature focusing on an historical event that provides an important lesson for ensuring a more sustainable and healthy environment. Please feel free to send suggestions to [Steve Gilbert](#).

The Collaborative on Health and the Environment offers this information as a service but does not endorse any of the events, articles or announcements.

Companion bulletins are available for different audiences:

- For those interested in environmental health as it relates to learning and developmental disabilities: <http://www.iceh.org/LDDIbulletins.html>
- For those interested in environmental health in Washington State and the Pacific Northwest: <http://washington.chenw.org/bulletins.html>

While there is overlap with this bulletin, there are some events and announcements unique to those bulletins.

If you would like to join the Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE) and the ICEH Working Group, please complete the application on the CHE website: <http://www.healthandenvironment.org/application> Joining CHE means receiving up to four email messages a month from the CHE National listserv. CHE costs nothing to join and the benefit is shared information and opportunities for further engagement, if you choose. Be sure to mark that you want to join the Initiative on Children's Environmental Health Working Group at the bottom of the application.

Nancy Snow
Collaborative on Health and the Environment

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)