



Connecticut School Indoor Environment Resource Team

TO: Schools Interested in Implementing EPA's Tools for Schools Program

FROM: Eugene Benoit, US EPA Region I
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(CT School Indoor Environment Resource Team)

RE: Guidance for Implementing the Tools for Schools Program

The purpose of this memo is to provide some initial guidance to school administrations and other agencies interested in implementing US EPA's Tools for Schools Program in their local school system. A growing number of school communities in Connecticut have identified poor indoor air quality in school facilities as an important public health issue. Attached is a short paper, "Indoor Air Quality Basics For Schools" which provides additional background information. The EPA Tools for Schools (TfS) Program is a low or no-cost, proactive strategy to address IAQ problems in schools through collaborative efforts involving school staff and parents. The program should not be viewed as a "quick fix" remedy, but rather an ongoing, preventive strategy. The EPA has developed a "tool" kit of useful materials to assist schools in implementing the program.

Several agencies and organizations, including EPA, have identified the need to provide assistance to school systems in order to implement EPA Tools for Schools, and have formed a consortium – the CT School Indoor Environment Resource Team. A primary objective of the Resource Team is to provide training and technical support to TfS coordinators and committees.

The First Step:

The first step is to arrange for a member of the Resource Team to present the program at a school administration executive staff meeting. This meeting should include the superintendent, school principals, the school facilities director, the school business manager and if appropriate, the supervisor of school nurses. The purpose of this presentation is to outline the benefits of the TfS program, relate the resources of our Team, answer questions, and discuss the implementation process. After several years of experience, we have found that this meeting is essential to successful implementation of the Tools for Schools program. **We have found that it is very important to make sure all executive staff are knowledgeable about TfS, and are "on board" with the program.**

After making the decision to implement the TfS program, the first step is to choose which schools will begin the program. We require that your school system establish TfS building teams in every school. If your school district is smaller (3 to 9 schools), we suggest you implement the program in all the schools simultaneously. If you have a larger school system, you may want to schedule a smaller group of schools, then the others at a later time.

School Responsibilities and Expectations:

Once the school district makes a commitment to implementing TfS, the next step is to recruit building teams in each of the schools, including a coordinator (or co-coordinator) for each committee. The coordinator may be the person who recruits the rest of the building teams in the individual schools. The most successful teams consist of 5 to 6 persons: school principal or other administrative staff, school nurse, a teacher, custodial staff, a concerned parent, and possibly a student on the high school TfS committee. We strongly recommend that you involve students in the upper grades in TfS – besides

providing assistance to the teams, TfS can be used as a great learning opportunity. The Resource Team encourages the local health department to be involved in the building teams as well. It should be noted that since the teachers' unions are part of the Resource Team, it is important to be in contact with the local affiliate when choosing the teacher representatives. We also suggest contacting the local PTA council. Ideally, the building team should meet roughly once a month throughout the school year, including training time.

Once the building teams have been recruited, the next item is to schedule training. Adequate training is perhaps the most important part of ensuring success for TfS, and therefore the school should offer strong support. The Resource Team has developed a two session training program. We encourage school districts to offer CEU credit for the training. The two teacher's unions also can provide CEU credits.

The first training session covers the basics of school indoor air quality, how to use the TfS kit, and developing a plan to get started. This session lasts 3 hours. After this session, the committees begin the assessment process, utilizing the checklists in the kit. After the building teams have collected and summarized the checklists (usually about 2 months), the second training session should be conducted. This is a 2-hour workshop led by one of our industrial hygienists on conducting walkthroughs. The outline on the following page provides an overview of the whole TfS "cycle" which we recommend conducting on a yearly basis (except for the training). After the first session has occurred, the committees should distribute the checklists (part of the kit) and begin communicating to the school community about TfS and the committee's work. After the second training, the committees will conduct a walk-through to investigate potential IAQ problems. The committees will continue to meet and work to identify, prioritize and facilitate remediation of IAQ problems. The Resource Team will be available on a consulting basis for assistance.

Overall, the time commitment for school building team members will include monthly meetings in the first year. As this program should be ongoing, it is probably a good idea to have committee members rotate out on a yearly basis. Note: we offer a "Refresher" workshop for districts that later want to help sustain the program.

Resource Team Resources:

As noted above, several CT agencies and organizations, along with EPA Region I have formed the CT School Indoor Environment Resource Team to assist schools. The committee includes public health professionals with IAQ expertise, industrial hygienists, and trainers. A two part-training program has been developed to train the committee to:

- collect and analyze potential IAQ problems using the kit;
- understand and evaluate ventilation systems;
- conduct site walk-throughs;
- develop and prioritize IAQ solutions; and
- communicate effectively with the school community.

Please contact Kenny Foscue or Joan Simpson at the CT Department of Public Health (860-509-7740), to find out more, and to begin the process of implementing the EPA Tools for Schools program.

EPA Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools

Implementation Guide Summary

This page summarizes each of the meetings that are involved in successful implementation of EPA's IAQ TFS Action Kit.

1. Initial School Team training

Team: *Principal, Nurse, Teacher, Parent, Custodian/facilities person.* The training covers why IAQ is important, what are the typical environmental problems encountered in schools, and how to use the kit.

2. Assemble Action Packets/Present TFS at a Faculty/staff Meeting

Team members prepare and assemble *action packets* that consist of a memo, background information on IAQ, and a checklist for each staff person's work area, all of which are included in the kit. Develop communication plan, including presentation to staff, letters to parents, etc.

3. Distribute Action Packets

The memo should mention when to return checklists, usually within 2 weeks. The checklist is both a learning tool for staff as well as an opportunity to let them know that they are part of the solution and that their opinions are very important. *As an alternative to manually distributing, collecting and summarizing the teachers' checklists, some districts have opted to use a web-based system such as Survey Monkey.*

4. Summarize checklists

The team uses information from the Taking Action video on how to best summarize the checklists. A floor plan of the school works best since the information needs to be easily accessible when conducting the walkthrough investigation. **View "Ventilation Basics Video."**

5. Training on conducting a walkthrough investigation

The team is trained on how their school's ventilation system operates, how the checklist summary is used, and how to conduct the investigation as a team in a systematic way.

6. Walkthrough Investigation

Using the methods outlined during the training session, the team conducts the investigation in a step wise manner paying particular attention to the checklist summary while using the knowledge and expertise they have acquired. *Local health department staff are encouraged to participate in these walkthroughs and should be contacted beforehand by the team.*

7. Prioritize Results of Investigation

The potential problems as well as all the positive things that were noted during the investigation need to be discussed and prioritized in terms of short/long term action steps and high/low cost solutions. From this meeting, a list of action steps will be developed.

8. Taking Action

This meeting focuses on the progress of the action items agreed upon by the team, as well as developing a time line for their completion. The team also determines dates for next year's implementation cycle. The team should also distribute to staff and parents a summary of the investigation and the steps being taken to address the issues.

For more detailed information about implementing the Tools for Schools Program, please read the Coordinator's Guide in the kit.