



Pilot program examines environmental health impacts at Southern California Schools

The Department of Toxic Substances Control and the United States Environmental Protection Agency have established the Schools Partnership pilot project to address environmental health impacts at Southern California Schools

The first meeting on Jan. 28 of the new “Southern California – Clean, Green and Healthy Schools Partnership” attracted more than 50 participants, including representatives of regulatory agencies, school districts, individual schools and community members from the desert to the sea.

The Partnership provides a forum for identifying and addressing complex environmental issues that face schools, said Thomas Cota, Branch Chief of the School Property Evaluation and Cleanup Division of the DTSC, which will be the clearinghouse for concerns. Issues brought to DTSC will be directed to the appropriate regulatory agency for an expedited response.

The Partnership was formed because people often aren’t sure who to contact if they have a school related environmental health concern.

“DTSC is the hub of the wheel,” said Cota. “We will triage the concern and direct it to the appropriate agency. We will make sure it gets to the right place.”

The core group of agencies includes DTSC, U.S. EPA, Cal EPA, California Department of Education, California Safe Schools, California Air Resources Board, California Department of Pesticide Regulation, Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles County of Public Health, UCI Pediatric Health Specialty Unit and Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. The partnership is designed to be broad based and flexible to allow for participant collaboration in promoting effective school environmental health measures.

The Partnership is a natural outgrowth of DTSC’s Schools Evaluation and Cleanup Program, which evaluates the environmental condition of proposed school sites that receive state funding. DTSC’s oversight ensures that school sites are free of contamination or have been cleaned up to acceptable levels.

Among the schools and districts registered to attend the first meeting were Santa Monica-Malibu Union School District, Mervyn M. Dymally High School, Hesperia I Unified School District, Pomona Unified School District, Paramount Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, Lowell Joint School District, Calexico Unified School District, San Bernardino City Unified School District, and Fontana Unified School District.

The program will be evaluated after six months to determine if it should continue. To request more information or report a concern, email: HealthySchools@dtsc.ca.gov.