

Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee

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November 15, 2005

Stephen L. Johnson, Administrator
 United States Environmental Protection Agency
 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20460

RE: Response to Gulf Coast Hurricanes

Dear Administrator Johnson:

The Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee (CHPAC) had a briefing at our October meeting regarding EPA's activities following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. CHPAC commends the EPA's response to Gulf State environmental devastation following the hurricanes including sampling and technical assistance to decision makers. As the EPA responds to the crisis with rule or standards waivers, advisories, data collection, technical assistance and any other policies or programs, we urge you to make pregnant women and children a high priority and to ensure that any actions take into account the disproportionate risks to children from environmental health and safety risks. We wanted to bring concerns about the children's environmental health impacts of the hurricanes expressed by members of the CHPAC to your attention. Briefly, they are as follows:

- The Committee noted that any exemptions to environmental protections need to be carefully assessed for their long-term impact on children given the unique environmental risks due to life stage vulnerabilities. Exemptions must be clearly thought out, temporary, and only applied when necessary.
- The release of heavy metals and many other chemical contaminants into the floodwaters in Louisiana and Mississippi from flooded industries and homes will result in children's exposures to chemicals in the sludge and dirt left indoors and out. Moisture left as the floodwaters receded has created conditions for high levels of mold contamination. State and local officials, community leaders and families need information on the appropriate protections that need to be taken in reentering and remediating buildings contaminated with biological and chemical hazards.

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- Assistance to local water agencies, counties and rural communities may be needed to ensure safe drinking water for children in their homes, schools, and day-care centers.
- The Committee is concerned that open burning has been suggested to destroy debris left in the wake of the hurricane. The resulting air pollution presents a hazard for the children in nearby communities.
- As talk turns to rebuilding the Gulf Coast communities, consideration of healthy and green building practices and smart growth land use at the local, state, and federal level would be very beneficial.
- Inclusion of community leaders, public health nurses, and community-based organizations, in remediating contaminated homes and rebuilding neighborhoods would be beneficial to the impacted communities.

We applaud EPA's efforts to include the Office of Children's Health Protection staff in any EPA efforts addressing the environmental impacts of the Gulf Coast hurricanes. OCHP will be able to help agency staff develop child sensitive approaches to 1) biological and chemical contamination in homes, schools and community health facilities, 2) indoor air and surface contamination from mold, 3) drinking water contamination, 4) debris disposal and 5) other assessment, remediation, and rebuilding concerns. We also encourage you to tap into the Committee's expertise, experience, and networks to help you respond to the environmental health impacts of these destructive storms.

Sincerely,



Melanie A. Marty, Ph.D., Chair
Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee

Cc: Barnes Johnston, Deputy Director, Office of Radiation and Indoor Air
Katrina Task Force
William Sanders, Acting Director, Office of Children's Health Protection
Joanne Rodman, Associate Director, Office of Children's Health Protection