

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 6

Children's Environmental Health Eighth Annual Program Highlights Report



Protecting Children Where They Live, Learn, and Play

October 1, 2017 - September 30, 2018



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Summary of Highlights for FY18

- The Children's Environmental Health (CEH) Program met all goals stated in *the War on Lead Region 6 Action Plan*.
- Under EPA funding, the PEHSU Trained 32 people in *Healthy Homes*, bringing the Regional total of number (from various grantees) to 1,247 people since 2011. The vast majority, being community health workers who each reached hundreds of families.¹
- About 50 people received training at the Lead Poisoning Prevention Workshop in Las Cruces, New Mexico.
- Over 100 people attended the Children's Health Symposium in Dallas, most receiving continuing education credits.
- More than 1,000 *Protecting Children's Health* tip sheets in English and Spanish, materials on lead poisoning prevention, and sun safety were distributed to *ChildCare Group* for a parent's health fair.
- The CEH Advisor provided 1,000 copies of the *Play It Safe* lead poisoning prevention brochure to Poison Control Centers in Dallas and El Paso.
- Region 6 Funded the Cherokee Nation to host the logistics and facilitation of the first Tribal CEH Symposium in Region 6 in Catoosa, Oklahoma.
- Regions 6 and 9 issued a joint RFP awarding \$224,500 supporting education on pediatric environmental health risks to five organizations in three states.
- Region 6 came in second place, with 53 new schools registered to implement the AQI Flag Program all located within the air quality north Texas non-attainment area. (There was actually 62 registrations, but 11 signed up after the deadline for the competition.)
- The Circuit Rider visited more than 157 entities in 108 communities in Texas, Louisiana and New Mexico. providing educational materials on lead based paint, environmental asthma triggers, sun safety, air quality, and other children's health issues.

¹ This is the first part of an FY18/19 initiative; already 95 have been trained in October 2018 which are not included in this year's total.

Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit: A Unique Partner

The Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) is a resource for pediatricians, public health officials, school personnel, and parents to get information about children's health and the environment. They are a key partner for the Children's Health Program.

There are ten PEHSUs in the US, one for each EPA Region. In Region 6, the PEHSU is called the **Southwest Center for Pediatric Environmental Health** and it is located on the campus of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in El Paso, Texas. EPA and ATSDR jointly fund the PEHSU program.

Since 1998, this network of experts has been working together to address the clinical and public health practice of children's environmental health, devoted to the rigor of evidence-based care in academic institutions. The PEHSUs provide clinical care to children with toxic exposures and disease of environmental origin, which is much needed because **twenty-five percent of US children live within one mile of a hazardous waste site**. They also serve as points of referral for practicing pediatricians and other health care providers. Their mission is to:

- Educate the public about environmental exposures and health outcomes
- Reduce environmental health threats to children;
- Improve access to expertise in pediatric environmental medicine; and
- Strengthen public health prevention capacity.

Region 6 relies heavily on the PEHSU to provide logistical support for conferences as well as CEH expertise, links to the PEHSU national network of pediatricians, and the development of *promotoras* (community health worker) workshops, Healthy Homes events, and other training opportunities throughout the year. This year, the EPA Administrator emphasized a strong push to eliminate lead poisoning. The PEHSU assisted in working toward that goal as detailed in the following report.

The Map below shows the location of each PESHU within each EPA Region.



Focus on Lead Poisoning Prevention

National War on Lead Initiative

In 2018, EPA announced a **War on Lead**. As the lead agency for the **President's Task Force on Health and Safety Risks to Children**, the Administrator requested the multi-agency Task Force to accelerate efforts to finalize the national lead strategy. After incorporating comments from each agency, the strategy was submitted to the Office of Management and Budget with an anticipated release of fall, 2018. Region 6 responded by initiating a War on Lead workgroup on March 20th to develop a Regional strategy to reduce childhood lead exposure. As a result, a Region 6 Draft Lead Action corresponds with the national strategy, which will address the following goals:

- Reduce sources of lead in children's environments
- Improve identification and monitoring of lead exposure to children
- Improve the health of children identified as lead-exposed
- Communicate effectively and consistently with stakeholders about childhood lead exposure and
- Plan cross-federal research to advance our scientific understanding of the effects evaluation and control of lead hazards in children's environments.

Lead Based Paint Program Summary

The Regional Lead-Based Paint program annually awards and oversees funding to states and/or Tribes to implement lead paint programs and provides accreditation to lead paint training providers. It works with building code and permitting officials regarding Renovation, Painting and Repair (RRP) Rule requirements and encourages them to inform homeowners and contractors during the permit process. It also reaches out to the regulated community to get RRP certified, informs homeowners to hire RRP-certified contractors, when renovating or painting pre-1978 housing and integrates assistance into inspections and enforcement to improve awareness and compliance with the rule.

Circuit Rider

For the past five years, the Lead Based Paint Program has supported a Senior Environmental Employee (SEE) to visit rural areas of Region 6. This SEE *Circuit Rider* travels to dozens of communities each year visiting with Planning and Zoning, Code Enforcement and Permitting Departments, public libraries, county courthouses, US Post Offices, and WIC/Head Start locations.

This year, **the Circuit Rider visited more than 157 entities in 108 communities in Texas, Louisiana and New Mexico**. In addition to visits to county and municipal offices, the Circuit Rider also represented EPA at ten (10) health fairs and three (3) general outreach events providing educational materials not only on lead based paint, but also on environmental asthma triggers, sun safety, air quality, and other children's health issues.

Healthy Homes Training

In FY18 the Lead Based Paint Program provided \$30,000 for the PEHSU to conduct several Healthy Homes training events targeted to the professional community. The RRP Rule requires

Focus on Lead Poisoning Prevention

the use of certified renovators to perform work in homes, daycares, and child-occupied facilities that were built prior to 1978. Lead based paint and RRP are part of the Healthy Homes curriculum; the PEHSU workshops focused on the need for the RRP and provided details on how to become certified. The aim was to educate professional renovators on the dangers of renovating a pre-1978 building without using lead-safe work practices, and to increase awareness of the availability of RRP certification classes. Ultimately, the goal was to reduce the number of children exposed to lead based paint dust due to renovations.

Workshops were held in Las Cruces (July 18th) and Albuquerque (August 13th) **training a total of 32** participants. More workshops are planned for the fall in Texas and Louisiana.

Testing for Lead in Drinking Water in Schools

EPA is responsible for ensuring the safety of our country's drinking water, working together with Tribal and state environmental or health agencies to accomplish this mission. Since testing is not mandatory in R6 states, EPA is concerned about the potential for elevated lead levels in the drinking water in schools. This is especially important since children are the most vulnerable to health risks associated with lead exposure.

With funding assistance from EPA, the PEHSU coordinated a workshop in Las Cruces on August 3rd. Presentations covered the 3Ts approach to reducing lead in drinking water: *Training, Testing, and Telling*. The 3Ts calls for schools to launch their own proactive campaigns of education, prevention, testing and remediation to minimize the threat of lead exposure from drinking water and to help ensure the safety of both the children and adults that use their facilities. The PEHSU reached out to local school districts in the Las Cruces area to attend the all-day event.

In addition, participants also learned about the RRP and health impacts of lead based paint and heard from speakers from the New Mexico Department of the Environment and the Health Department. About **50 people received training**.



Children's Health Symposia

Continuing an initiative started in 2015, Region 6 funded another CEH Symposia in 2018, bringing the total number to three in Texas. The first in El Paso, the second in Brownsville, (2016) and the third in Dallas September 13-14, 2018. More than 100 people attended the two-day event, held at the Double Tree Hotel. Regional Administrator Anne, Idsal offered opening remarks. Sessions included topics on lead poisoning prevention, integrated pest management, primordial health care, arsenic, and other impacts on children's health.

Participants traveled from all over Texas to attend—from El Paso to Tyler and Lubbock to Brownsville. There were also at least two out-of-state participants, and speakers came from Boston, San Francisco, Washington, DC, and Dallas to present. Attendees included nurses, pediatricians, social workers, child care providers, community health workers, nurse practitioners, toxicologists, public health professionals and they represented state health agencies, hospitals, universities, and non-profit organizations.

Results

In addition to the **100 people who attended, many of who received continuing education credits**, there were several positive outcomes from the event that contributed to building partnerships.²

First, the Children's Health Program **developed a new relationship with Child Care Group**, an organization that operates six child care centers with a focus on early education, a parent support program, and provider training. EPA provided more than **1,000 children's tip sheets in English and Spanish, materials on lead poisoning prevention, and sun safety**. ChildCare Group will give the materials to parents during their home safety fair at Bachman Lake at the end of September. Second, the Dallas Housing Authority invited EPA staff to participate in the National Night Out event on their Lake West campus combining a safety event with children's health.



We also met with the **University of Texas at El Paso** to learn more about their efforts to prevent lead poisoning, shared information about potential grant opportunities, and provided Healthy Homes curriculum materials for their community outreach. We also connected with Texas A&M Transportation Institute and discussed plans to meet in the fall to learn about their school environmental health study.

We connected with the **US Department of Health and Human Services** Regional Health Administrator on a potential MOU, and **Texas Department of State Health Services** on their lead poisoning prevention program. Finally, the **Poison Control Center** requested **1,000** copies of the *Play It Safe* lead poisoning prevention brochure.

In a similar vein, Region 6 also funded the Cherokee Nation to host the logistics and facilitation of the **first Tribal CEH Symposium** in Region 6 to be held in Catoosa, Oklahoma in October (FY19). Two more symposia are also being planned for Louisiana and Arkansas within the next two years, rounding out a target of holding at least one symposium in every Region 6 state over a 5-year period.

² Attendees included 106 the first day and 96 on the second day.

Children's Health Month - A Banner Year

Each October, EPA places special emphasis on children's health events to recognize Children's Health Month. In FY2018, Region 6 was keenly focused on developing a joint RFP with Region 9 to announce the availability of funds for CEH projects that target communities along the US/Mexico Border; this was the first time in many years that the CEH program received funds to be able to announce a significant RFP. A Series of CEH symposia in California and Texas helped to lay the foundation for cementing key partnerships with the Region 6 Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit, EPA's Region 9 Children's Health and Border programs, the Office of Children's Health Protection (OCHP) and the Office of International and Tribal Affairs. Proposals were reviewed in September and selected during Children's Health Month.

That relationship resulted in OCHP providing **\$70,000 in additional funding** for Regions 6 and 9 to be used to support prenatal environmental health education, healthy childcare education, environmental health youth summits, and pediatric environmental health risks in southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas communities. The Regions added additional program resources to the OCHP money with the goal of leveraging the funds to award more grants. The outcome of our efforts resulted in a leveraged funding amount of **\$224,500 being awarded** to the following five organizations.

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| • The New Mexico Department of Health | \$50,000 |
| • Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso (TTUHSC EP) and
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine (UTRGV) | \$45,000 |
| • Texas A&M University School of Public Health | \$45,000 |
| • The Mariposa Community Health Center | \$45,000 |
| • The Sonora Environmental Research Institute | \$39,500 |

Quantitative Measures from these grants will be counted toward FY19 results.



Looking forward to FY19

Region 6 already has several events lined up for October (FY19):

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| October 10 | EPA will participate in the Dallas Housing Authority's National Night Out/Children's Health Awareness event at the Hamptons at Lake West campus in west Dallas on October 10 th and will share children's health materials with local residents. |
| October 11 | Provided sun safety materials for first graders at Mary Moore Elementary in Arlington. |
| October 12 | The PEHSU will sponsor a training for community health workers in El Paso. |
| October 18 | Representatives from EPA's lead based paint program will be present at the Kerr County Employee Health Fair in Kerrville, Texas. |
| October 16-18 | EPA will sponsor a Tribal Children's Environmental Health Symposium focusing on protecting children where they <i>live, learn, and play</i> in Catoosa, Oklahoma. |
| October 25 | Region 6 staff will present children's health at an HHS Federal workgroup meeting |
| October 28 | To raise awareness during Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, EPA staff will be in Nacogdoches, Texas at Healthy Halloween children's health event. |

Advising and Coordinating on Children's Health Programs

One of the Children's Health Advisor's roles is to ensure children's environmental health messages are incorporated in programs across the Region and to coordinate with programs where they is a nexus with CEH. Environmental Education, US/Mexico Border, Environmental Justice, Tribal, Drinking Water, and other programs frequently touch upon CEH issues.

OCHP

The Advisor continues to attend monthly CEH national calls, coordinates with other senior agency CEH leaders, and advises newer Regional Coordinators. In 2018, she consulted with Region 6 staff and HQ management to overcome Regional contract obstacles to obtain logistics support from a national contract for the Tribal Summit to be held in Region 6 in October.

Air Quality

The CEH Advisor was one of several Region 6 employees who **attended a half day focus session** hosted by the City of Dallas' Office of Environmental Quality (OEQ) and the Nature Conservancy on Friday, November 17, 2017. They were seeking input to address the challenge of childhood asthma and poor air quality in the Dallas area. The session, attended by key stakeholders considered the concept of a collaborative research and implementation initiative to monitor local air quality at DISD schools with known high rates of asthma, related absenteeism, and a plan to study the impacts of proposed interventions. (Note: In the summer of 2018, there has been some follow up initiated).



For two years in a row, the CEH Advisor enrolled the Region in the springtime *AQI Flag Program Challenge*. Last year, Region 6 placed third in the national competition to secure as many new schools as possible in the program. In FY18, **Region 6 came in second place, with 53 new schools registered to implement the AQI Flag Program all located within the air quality north Texas non-attainment area.** (While the actual number of registrants was **62**, only 53 registered prior to the deadline.)

During the summer, the Advisor coordinated with OAQPS, ATSDR, the PEHSU, and OCHP related to the release of Ethylene Oxide. OAQPS requested assistance with communicating health risks associated with the release of this chemical which was noted to be higher in in some regions as recorded in a recent report than in previous reports.

Environmental Education, Earth Day and Border

This spring, CEH Advisor volunteered to **read grant proposals** and recommend funding to support the **Environmental Education Program**. CEH had an exhibit for Earth Day at Fair Park. Five staff from the Multimedia Division set up or volunteered to staff a booth the weekend of April 20-22, 2018. The Children's Health program coordinated logistics for the event.

The Advisor also met several times with the US/Mexico Border program to share information about on-going CEH Border work and to **ensure CEH was included as a fundamental strategy in addressing Border 2020 goals.**

Advising and Coordinating on Children’s Health Programs

Drinking Water

In FY18 the Drinking Water Program tested Tribal schools and Head Start facilities for lead in drinking water. After the testing, an email was sent that gave the facilities an advance update of the results. The email will be followed up with a formal letter to the Governor with the paper copy of the lab results. The CEH Advisor is listed in the letter as the contact for questions for parents or community members.

Facilitation and Presentations

On April 4th, the CEH Advisor **facilitated a first-ever bi-regional (R6/R9) children's health/border conference call**. The purpose of the call was to create a synergy and open the lines of communication between grantees who are working across three states (TX, NM, AZ) on children's health issues--lead, asthma, integrated pest management, and reducing exposure to hazardous chemicals-- to introduce Region 6 and Region 9 grantees to each other, and to share training curriculum and other resources. Five grantees, Regional children's health and border staff, and headquarters were all represented on the call. Grantees requested EPA create a digital space to collect/share CEH curriculum. The next call will be in 3-6 months, dependent upon grantee's request.

On July 11th, Region 6 and 9 staff **co-presented during an ORD webinar** on CEH initiatives on the US-Mexico border from 2014 thru 2018. The presentation covered the symposia in 2015 and 2016, Healthy Homes training, vector-borne illness training and the activities of the CEH grantees.

On August 28th, the CEH Advisor presented the success of the Region 6 strategy to promote the AQI Flag Program on a quarterly national webinar, describing how our approach garnered dozens of new registrations during the spring challenge.

Coordinating with External Partners

The **PEHSU** continues to be a key partner for Region 6 and in FY18, they hosted a series of Healthy Homes events and Promotora workshops focusing on lead poisoning prevention. The course is designed for environmental health professionals, community health workers, school health workers, housing advocates, code enforcement inspectors, and other public health front line workers.

July 18	Healthy Homes in Las Cruces, NM	20 community health workers attended
August 13	Healthy Homes in Albuquerque, NM	12 people attended
October 12	Promotora Workshop in El Paso	85 registered as of October 1st

Additional workshops are in development for FY19 in Louisiana and Arkansas.

The **City of Dallas** has always been a partner for CEH initiatives. On July 9, Region 6 lead and CEH staff met with Bob Curry, Code Compliance Manager for the City of Dallas to discuss ways city code can support children's environmental health and lead poisoning prevention. Mr. Curry was asked to present his approach to Healthy Homes during the CEH Symposium in Dallas on September 15th.

The **Health and Wellness Alliance for Children (HWAC)**, a division of Children's Health Hospital has been a significant partner with Region 6 for several years. Region 6 Children's Health Advisor met with Respiratory Therapist during the last week in January to re-connect on children's health initiatives. As a result of the meeting, Children's Health was a key participant in the CEH Symposium in Dallas later in the year facilitating the continuing education credits and providing two presenters for the training.

Region 6 **HHS Administration for Children and Families Working Group** hosts a quarterly meeting in which the CEH Advisor participates. While the meetings were suspended for most of 2018, the ACF has requested to meet with EPA in late October to learn more about ways in which to collaborate.

In late summer, the Children's Health Staff attended a brief meeting and bus tour of the **Trinity Park Conservancy's** office and planned park area for the 200-acre Trinity Park. The CEH Advisor was invited because of her ongoing partnership with the Health and Wellness Alliance for Children (She served as co-chair of the HWAC's Asthma sub-committee with current Conservancy CEO, Brett Brown). The Conservancy plans to hold several community workshops and would like for EPA to participate.

Finally, the CEH Advisor was featured for the CEH Symposium in the September edition of the Region 6 internal **Weekly Newsletter** and also on the main **EPA intranet** page at the beginning of Children's Health Month.