

OHA EnviroNews

Environmental and Occupational Safety Issues

February 2010

Hospital Pharmacy Planning Committee Created

The OHA Environmental Leadership Council formed a Pharmacy Planning Committee at its last meeting in October. Committee members include hospitals as well as representatives from the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC), Cuyahoga County Board of Health and Cardinal Health. The committee was formed as part of the Ohio Environmental Education Fund grant that will enable OHA to educate hospitals, health care workers and the public regarding proper disposal of medication.

The committee also is working on scheduling a community pharmacy take-back event for as early as May. The goal of the take-back event—besides collecting unused pharmaceuticals—is to create a “how to” operation document based on the pilot event that will include an overview of applicable law and policy, a description of prominent existing programs and the context in which they have been developed, steps in planning and holding a take-back program, and a list of resources.

Upcoming Event: Proper Medication Disposal Roundtable

The OHA Environmental Leadership Council will host a roundtable March 12 at Grant Medical Center, Columbus, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The OEC, along with the Ohio EPA, will present “Why it Matters? The Importance of Proper Medication Disposal.” If you are interested in attending, contact Susan Zabo at susanz@ohanet.org or 614.738.2186.

Diesel Pollution and Solution – OHA Hosts Anti-Idling Meeting

OHA hosted a meeting for Central Ohio hospitals in January with the Ohio Environmental Council, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission and The Cleveland Clinic presenting policies and ways to reduce/eliminate unnecessary idling of vehicles. Since the meeting, the Columbus Dispatch published an [article](#) February 5th about a proposed city ban on idling.

Did you know that idling a vehicle for only 10 minutes a day uses more than 27 gallons of fuel a year? Idling contributes to counties failing minimal federal air quality standards? One hour of idling equals 33 miles of wear and tear on a vehicle? Reducing/eliminating unnecessary idling from diesel and gasoline vehicles will aide counties in meeting federal air quality standards for ozone and particle pollution. It also will save money, reduce wear and tear on engines, reduce health risks associated with gasoline and diesel and lessen dependence on foreign oil. Cleveland, Maple Heights and South Euclid have city-wide (public and private) no-idling laws in effect and are considered model cities. (OEC Meeting)

Hospitals Asked for Input on Infectious Waste Regulations Reform

The Ohio EPA recently asked OHA and member hospitals for reaction to a legislative proposal that would lead to revised infectious waste rules. OHA supports the proposal “in concept” but requests comments from Ohio hospitals. In any legislation, OHA will advocate that new statutory provisions make it more likely that future infectious waste regulations will be science-based and workable.

Examples of OEPA proposed changes:

- Broad language in law and specific definitions in rule that are consistent with existing federal programs.
- Definitions would be based on science and consistent with federal programs
- Shipping papers could be electronic and consistent with requirements of the U.S. Department of Transportation.
- Registration would be site-specific and provide more flexibility.
- Hospitals could transport red bag and other waste in same vehicle.
- Allow use of reusable container without requiring red bag.
- Loosen requirement of spill kits in manner consistent with federal regulations.

If you are interested in more information or participating in future meetings please contact Rick Sites at ricks@ohanet.org.

Fisher-Titus Medical Center Hosts Roundtable, Mini P2 University

In January, Fisher-Titus Medical Center hosted a roundtable and Mini Pollution Prevention University (P2U) where attendees visited the hospital pharmacy to view the pharmaceutical reverse distribution program. Participants walked through the pharmacy and asked the pharmacist questions on procedures. Participants then discussed how their hospitals were handling the reverse distribution.

Sharon Barnes from Barnes Nursery also spoke to the group about food composting for hospitals and how to implement a composting program. Participants then viewed the composting done using food waste from the Fisher-Titus cafeteria.

As part of the Mini Pollution Prevention University (P2U), Lisa Meyer from Fisher-Titus shared information about Fisher-Titus P2 programs participants, thereby enabling participants to take home information they could use to enhance their existing waste management programs.



Mitigating the Problem of Pharmaceuticals in Drinking Water

Americans tend to use pharmaceuticals for everything from going to sleep to waking up to stabilizing moods, without thinking what happens to the drugs? The medications can enter the water supply when people flush old pills down the toilet or through the urine of people taking medicine. Water treatment facilities are not equipped to handle all of the drugs that enter the water supply, and bottled water generally is no better because it often comes from the same sources. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires hundreds of tests each month on municipal water supplies, but the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which regulates bottled water, only requires one test a week on bottled water.

Testing technology has gone from being able to test water in terms of parts per million to parts

per billion, meaning more and more drugs in the water supply can be identified. The impact of some of these drugs on human health is not clear. For example, antibiotics are showing up in our drinking water at a time when 65,000 Americans die each year from antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

The EPA put 13 pharmaceuticals on a Contaminant Candidate [List](#) for the first time this year. Most are hormones, but the list also includes the antibiotic erythromycin.

The FDA recently updated its [list](#) of waste drugs that should not be flushed down the toilet as well as the recommendation that consumers mix old medication with kitty litter or coffee grounds. According to Ellen Mee, director of environmental health policy at the Ohio Environmental Council, the FDA advises consumers to break medications up and mix them with wet garbage so they're not retrievable. The National Toxicology Program is researching how human health might be harmed by drugs that get into the water. . (Food Chain Radio Discussion)

DEP Tests Show Prescription Drugs Leaching from Landfills in Maine

The [Maine Department of Environmental Protection](#) (MDEP) says it now has enough evidence to prove that unwanted prescription drugs being tossed into local landfills pose a threat to surface and groundwater supplies around the state. New test results at three Maine landfills show high concentrations of a wide range of pharmaceuticals. Mark Hyland of the MDEP Bureau of Remediation and Waste Management was asked by drug makers to prove these findings. Drug makers argued that if unused medications shouldn't be flushed down the toilet because of the risk to ground water, then the best option was to throw them out with the trash until evidence shows this also poses a threat.

Hyland said he can prove that prescription drugs are showing up in water that collects at three Main landfills: Augusta, Brunswick and Bath. The landfill was shown to include things like antidepressants, antibiotics, steroids, hormones, heart and asthma medications and pain medication.

Maine introduced legislation that would require drug companies to be responsible for collecting and disposing of unwanted drugs in medical waste incinerators. The drug companies are opposed to the idea.

Research shows that in Maine 2.7 million prescriptions were written in 2008. Some estimates suggest as many as half of the prescribed medicine is thrown away or sits unused on a shelf.

Radon Gas Identified as Leading Cause of Cancer

The World Health Organization and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have announced a call to action for Americans to test their homes for radon gas, which has recently been identified as the leading cause of lung cancer for non-smokers in the U.S.

Radon is a naturally occurring, radioactive gas that seeps out of the ground and can enter homes and other buildings. Since radon is invisible and odorless, the only way to know if a home has dangerous levels of the gas is to conduct a radon test.

The EPA estimates that as many as eight million homes in the U.S. currently have elevated levels of radon. It also predicts that if action is not taken to correct this problem, between 15,000 and 22,000 deaths will occur in 2010 from exposure to the gas.

Radon causes more deaths each year in the U.S. than any other in-home hazard, including fires and carbon monoxide deaths combined. For more information about radon gas, visit the National Radon Month Web site at www.RadonMonth.WordPress.com (Environmental News).

Climate Change Report

According to new reports, the Midwest has both bad and good news related to global warming. The bad news is that global warming will cause more “oddball winter weather” in the region and the good news is that the solution to climate change could boost jobs and revenue growth.

The reports predict bigger snowstorms but less ice cover on the Great Lakes in years to come as climate change causes unpredictable winter weather patterns, the National Wildlife Federation [report](#) warned.

Climate change will drive increased lake effect snowfall, but less snow for skiers and snowmobile riders, unstable ice fishing conditions and heavier rainfall and more flooding. Such changes could alter local ecosystem, harm agriculture, strain government budgets and reduce winter weather tourism and recreation.

Global Warming also is predicted to cause shorter, milder winters on average, though there will be surprises that will put a strain on people, government economies and wildlife.

A new [report](#) by Climate Group and University of Michigan says that three low-carbon technologies hold significant potential for job creation and revenue growth in the Midwest over the next five years. The study says that policies that stimulate growth in the wind turbine component, hybrid power train and advanced battery manufacturing sectors could create over 22,000 new jobs, \$3.2 billion in additional market revenues and over \$148 million in state and local tax revenues for Ohio by 2015.

The report analyzes the impact of three climate and energy policies: a \$17 per ton price on carbon in 2015 resulting from a cap on emissions; a national renewable electricity standard of 20 percent by 2020; and a “green” economic stimulus package. (Gongwer)

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