



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

NEWS RELEASE

Department of Toxic Substances Control

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Report Summarizes Efforts to Build Environmentally Safe Schools

SACRAMENTO--- “Over the past two years, we have set a national standard by conducting extensive environmental reviews to ensure that new schools built with taxpayer money are environmentally safe and that children are protected from the potential effects of exposure to hazardous materials. California is the only state in the nation that requires these reviews for new and expanding schools,” said Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) Director Ed Lowry.

Lowry’s comments were made upon the release of an informational report entitled “School Property Evaluation and Cleanup Division Biennial Report.” The report summarizes the efforts of a DTSC program created by legislation (AB 387-Wildman and SB 162-Escutia) signed into law by Governor Gray Davis. The legislation emerged, in part, because of DTSC’s work with the Los Angeles Unified School District, most notably at the proposed Belmont and Southgate school sites, and several legislative hearings.

State Senator Martha Escutia (D-Norwalk), the author of SB 162, commented: “I am pleased with the progress made by the DTSC. Ensuring environmentally safe schools and protecting the health of children are sound investments in our state’s future and its well being. Furthermore, our children and teachers have a right to attend school without the threat of illness from environmental hazards. Implementation of this legislation protects that right.”

Under the legislation, DTSC was designated as the lead environmental agency to oversee environmental assessments as part of the California Department of Education’s (CDE) review process. The Education Code defined procedures for buying property and building new schools, but the CDE did not have trained professionals knowledgeable in hazardous materials who could review environmental information submitted with applications for state funding.

Over the past two years, DTSC has worked with 280 school districts in 45 of California’s 58 counties and has made 752 project determinations within highly compressed timelines outlined in the legislation ensuring that classrooms are made available as quickly as possible.

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Highlights of the informational report include:

- Background on contamination at school sites
- Overview of the three-step process used by the DTSC to conduct the environmental assessments.
- Statutory time frames
- Guidance, policies and fact sheets, and
- Overviews of challenges faced with contamination at industrial sites (usually in urban areas) and agricultural sites (usually found in rural areas).

The report is an informational summary of a report prepared by DTSC for the Legislature. Both versions of the report are available on the DTSC web site (www.dtsc.ca.gov).

School sites reviewed by DTSC through December 2001 are listed by Senate and Assembly District.

Copies of individual county reports and the School Report are available by fax. Please call Lisa Gray at 916.324.0936 if you are interested in receiving one.

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The Department of Toxic Substances Control's mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the environment and ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality by regulating hazardous waste, conducting and overseeing cleanups, and developing and promoting pollution prevention.

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"The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption. For a list of simple ways you can reduce demand and cut your energy costs, see our Web-site at www.dtsc.ca.gov."