

School Environment Team (SET) Project

Conceptual Development and Plans for the Future

INTRODUCTION

In February of 1998, the PTA Council of Howard County (PTACHC) voted to establish a special Environmental Issues Committee to address concerns at county schools. The committee is dedicated to increased education and awareness of the impact of indoor/outdoor environments on the health and safety of school occupants. Several objectives were established, one of which was to develop a tracking system to monitor these environments.

SET Project OVERVIEW

The first meetings with the Howard County Department of Education regarding a school team that addressed environmental issues were held in the spring of 1998. During the summer, the committee began work on the School Environment Team (SET) Project. The committee's charge was to design guidelines to establish SET programs at each public school in Howard County. The goal of the teams is to maintain the proper environment at schools, enhancing the ability of students to learn, and teachers and staff to perform their jobs. The establishment of a SET Project Team at each school by its nature and scope, will enhance the quality of Howard County Department of Education facilities in the areas of

- health and safety,
- communication,
- educating building users regarding the importance of indoor environments,
- reducing maintenance costs,
- preventing adverse environmental effects.

BACKGROUND & RESEARCH

The initial resource the committee used to research development of such a system was the Tools for Schools Action Kit developed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Included in the research are the recommendations of the Maryland State Department of Education with regard to indoor environments. The committee was also directed by Howard County Public School System's (HCPSS) Safety and Insurance Specialist to other resources.

The format from Tools for Schools was analyzed and modified it to meet the goals established. The EPA's work was expanded upon; resulting in a **preventative** program designed to maintain the health and safety of children and staff.

As the concept developed, our goals became clear:

- ◆ Identify potential concerns before they reached the level where occupants' health and safety are at risk.
- ◆ Improve and facilitate communication at all levels.
- ◆ Increase education and awareness of the importance of maintaining proper indoor environments.
- ◆ Include not only indoor environments but also adjacent grounds at school facilities.

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Additional research included identification of those areas that the Safety and Insurance Specialist and his associate, HCPSS's Environmental Specialist, considered to be "critical areas" where environmental concerns were greatest. A joint walk-through occurred on September 16, 1998, at Mt. Hebron High School. In May of 1998, a second walk-through was conducted at Atholton High School with the same goal.

With the HCPSS's help, the committee met with representatives of Food Services, Custodial Services, and the Maintenance Department to solicit their input in the development of materials.

Based on meetings and research, it is suggested that the SET Project Team be comprised of representatives from each school to include: an administrator, faculty, Food Services, Custodial Services, Health Room Assistant, support services, parent(s), the local PTA Environmental Issues Committee Chairperson, and student(s) (where age appropriate).

The SET Project Notebook contains all of the materials that would be needed to establish a Team and implement the program. Included in the notebook is the Master Checklist to be used in all areas of a school facility. Some of the classrooms have supplemental checklists, ie: science, shop, art, home economics and relocatables. In addition, there is a checklist for adjacent school grounds and instructions on how to incorporate Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

NEXT STEPS

The SET Project will be launched via presentations to the Principals, Assistant Principals and at a PTA Council General Meeting. Following these presentations there will be a Workshop(s) scheduled to train appropriate local PTA members. The actual SET Project notebooks will be distributed at that time.

All participating schools and supportive organizations will be recognized.