



Center for Health, Environment & Justice

NEWS RELEASE

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WWI Chemical Found in Air Outside 15 Public Schools

EPA Air Monitors Detect High Levels of Acrolein

Falls Church, VA – During World War I, acrolein was used to create a chemical weapon to irritate the skin and lungs of enemy soldiers. Today, this same compound has been found in the air surrounding fifteen public schools being monitored under the Environmental Protection Agency’s Schools Monitoring Initiative.

Schools in Alabama, California, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, Ohio and South Carolina were found to have average levels of acrolein one hundred times higher than is considered safe for long-term exposure. Breathing acrolein can damage the lungs and exacerbate asthma. There is little research on the long-term adverse health impacts of exposure to acrolein.

“History lessons on World War I should be confined to the text books, not reenacted in the air our children breathe,” said Lois Gibbs, Executive Director of the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ). “Children are required to spend up to eight hours a day in school. It is our responsibility to ensure that schools are a safe, healthy space to learn.”

Renée Blanchard, Campaign Coordinator for CHEJ’s [safe schools initiative](#) added, “These schools were chosen for monitoring because they are situated near sources of industrial pollution. We cannot build schools next to toxic dumps or chemical manufacturing plants and expect toxic pollution not to cross into the schoolyard. Safe School Siting policies must be quickly adopted at the state and local levels if we are to prevent similar health crisis in the future. In communities where existing schools are being polluted by nearby toxic chemicals, authorities must work closely with those communities to find an acceptable action plan.”

The [EPA School Monitoring Initiative](#) was announced in March, 2009 in response to alarming findings by [USA Today](#) with the assistance of CHEJ that identified hundreds of public schools with toxic industrial air pollution. CHEJ has been a national leader on the issue of safe school siting, drafting [model school siting legislation](#) and serving on a stakeholder’s taskforce to aid the EPA in developing national guidelines.