

Working Toward a Healthy Environment

A Resource List for Western Pennsylvania

Pittsburgh has a rich industrial and environmental history. Starting in the 1800s, the region's steel production and other industries played a critical role in propelling the U.S. industrial revolution forward. As a result, many areas were intensely polluted and Pittsburgh became known world-wide for its dirty environment.

The tension between environmental pollution and protection are etched throughout Pittsburgh's history. As early as the 1890s, women concerned about public health began to organize against smoke pollution. Early on, Pittsburgh was compelled to regulate its own air before being mandated to do so by the federal government. In recent years, Pittsburgh and the state of Pennsylvania have taken leadership roles in confronting the harmful health effects that have resulted from environmental contaminants. Pittsburgh is now a leader in green buildings, green chemistry and a commitment to preserving our natural spaces as essential for the region's future and economic development. There are many local organizations working to advance Pittsburgh's greening and to provide resources and services for individuals and institutions to protect the environment and human health.

This fact sheet provides information, resources and opportunities for you to get involved in making Pittsburgh and its surrounding areas healthier places to live.

This fact sheet is part of the Women's Health and the Environment toolkit. Go to www.womenshealthandenvironment.org/toolkit to learn about how our health and the environment are connected and about ways to protect our families and communities.



Two Major Issues Affecting Pennsylvanians' Health: Mercury and Air Quality

Mercury

Mercury is widely understood to affect brain development, especially in the very young. Coal-fired power plants are responsible for approximately 80 percent of the mercury released in Pennsylvania. The state ranks third in the nation for emitting the most mercury from power plants.¹

The good news: In 2007 the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection announced a new rule that will achieve 90 percent cuts in mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants by 2015. This is a significant victory for Pennsylvanians.

For more information about mercury in Pennsylvania, visit:

- **PennFuture's Special Campaign to Protect Babies from Toxic Mercury Pollution:** This project provides resources to empower citizens to reduce toxic mercury emissions from Pennsylvania's coal-fired power plants. www.protectbabies.org
- **The Learning Disabilities Association of America's Healthy Children Project** (based in Pittsburgh) provides information about the health impacts of environmental contaminants on children. www.healthychildrenproject.org
- **The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection** is the state agency largely responsible for administering Pennsylvania's environmental laws and regulations. www.depweb.state.pa.us/mercury
- **The Pennsylvania Department of Health** provides information regarding many health topics, including impacts from mercury. www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health



Take the Rachel Carson Legacy Challenge
The Rachel Carson Homestead challenges people to commit to everyday actions that protect the environment and our health. Efforts are in honor of Rachel Carson, an extraordinary leader in the movement for a healthy environment, who was born near Pittsburgh 100 years ago.

To learn more go to www.rachelcarsonhomestead.org.

Air Quality

Despite the progress with coal-fired power plant emissions, Pennsylvania still has problems with air quality. In fact, eight out of 10 Pennsylvania residents live in areas that have failed air quality standards since 2001.² Poor air quality is associated with many diseases, including asthma, heart disease and lung disease. Air pollution comes from many sources, including cars, freight trucks, power plants and factories. Diesel emissions are a significant source of this pollution and area groups have formed a county-wide partnership to reduce diesel emissions. The partnership is targeting school buses first, because children are vulnerable and emissions concentrate inside the buses. But waste haulers, construction equipment and boats are significant sources of our local problem.

The good news: You can help improve air quality and reduce diesel emissions. To learn more about what you can do, check out these organizations:

- **Clean Water Action** is one of the collaborators in the Allegheny County Partnership to Reduce Diesel Pollution. www.cleanwateraction.org/pa/diesel.html
- **Group Against Smog and Pollution** is also a collaborator in Allegheny County Partnership to Reduce Diesel Pollution. www.gasp-pgh.org
- **The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Air Quality** provides a wealth of statewide information and resources regarding air quality. www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/airwaste/airquality
- **The Allegheny County Health Department, Air Quality** offers countywide air quality data and links to resources. www.achd.net/airqual/airstart.html
- **RiverQuest** is a science and environmental educational organization offering river-based educational programs for students, teachers and the community. www.riverquest.org
- **Healthy Home Resources** works with parents of asthmatic children to reduce in-home exposures to contaminants. www.healthyhomeresources.org/asthma_main.htm
- **Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh's Allergy, Immunology and Infectious Diseases Department** has a world-class team of asthma researchers and community programs. www.chp.edu/greystone/allergy/asthub.php
- **University of Pittsburgh Medical Center** provides information and resources on asthma. <http://asthma.upmc.com>

Other Community Efforts to Protect Pennsylvanians' Health

There are many organizations in Pittsburgh working to protect people's health. To get involved in making changes in your community, contact any of the following organizations:

- **PennFuture and Pennsylvania Conservation Voters Education League** work to strengthen policy related to health and the environment. www.pennfuture.org and www.protectpa.org
- **Women's Health and Environmental Network** champions the health of women and their families by reducing environmental exposures through education, research and direct action. www.when.org
- **Sustainable Pittsburgh** focuses on integrating economic prosperity, social equity and environmental quality to bring sustainable solutions to communities and businesses. www.sustainablepittsburgh.org
- **Clean Water Action leads the PA Campaign for Clean Water**, a coalition fighting to protect our state's streams, stop destruction of our wetlands and improve management of stormwater runoff. www.cleanwateraction.org/pa
- **The 3 Rivers Wet Weather Demonstration Program** works with 83 communities to address the issue of untreated sewage and stormwater overflowing into our region's waterways. www.3riverswetweather.org

- **The Center for Healthy Environments and Communities (CHEC) at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health** offers access to local environmental health data, opportunities for collaboration and outreach that helps people improve their lives and neighborhoods. www.chec.pitt.edu
- **Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, Pittsburgh Affiliate** aims to end breast cancer by empowering individuals, ensuring quality care for all and energizing science to find the cause and cure to this disease. www.pittsburghraceforthecure.org
- **The Collaborative on Health and the Environment in Pennsylvania** is a network of individuals and organizations addressing the growing concerns about the links between human health and environmental factors through science dissemination, collaboration and education. www.che-penn.org

Pittsburgh is a leader in the green and healthy building movement: the city has the second highest number of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified commercial buildings in the country.³

Local Resources to Make Your Home Healthier

There are many simple actions that we can take right now to help protect our health and our family's health. For example, eliminating environmental contaminants in our homes is an important step toward preventing harm. Some local organizations that can help you make these changes include:

- **The Eat Well Guide and Local Harvest** are great websites that help you find local organic and sustainable farms, grocery stores and restaurants. www.eatwellguide.org and www.localharvest.org
- **Farmers' Market Alliance** provides information on farmers' markets in Western Pennsylvania. www.farmersmarketalliance.com
- **The Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture** helps connect consumers with farmers and provides information on sustainable agriculture. www.pasafarming.org
- **The Center for Environmental Oncology at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute** has great resources to help you make simple changes at home, including making your own household cleaners and pesticides. www.environmentaloncology.org/ec.htm
- **Healthy Home Resources** equips individuals and families with the knowledge, support and tools needed to reduce exposure to indoor environmental hazards. They are available to answer questions from the public. www.healthyhomeresources.org
- **Green Building Alliance** provides workshops on healthy building design and gives tours of environmentally designed buildings in the Greater Pittsburgh area. www.gbapgh.org
- **The Pennsylvania Resources Council** provides resources to deal with hazardous wastes in the home, composting and other statewide environmental issues. www.prc.org
- **Construction Junction** is a non-profit venture that offers reusable building materials at low cost to the community. www.constructionjunction.org
- **Conservation Consultants Inc.** is a non-profit organization offering a range of consulting services to improve energy efficiency and comfort in new and existing buildings, including business, schools, homes and places of worship. www.ccicenter.org

What You Can Do at Work

Reducing Workplace Hazards and Exposures

Adults often spend more time at work than anywhere else. Those who work in industrial settings are exposed to toxic materials more than the general public and often bring these contaminants home. Workplace safety and health are at the center of the struggle to prevent and reduce workers' exposures to environmental contaminants. Some resources on workplace exposures and health protections include:

- **United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America** provides information to stewards, officers and workers on workplace health and safety issues, worker rights and more. www.ranknfile-ue.org/h&sindex.html
- **The Worker Health Protection Program** has useful fact sheets and worker health links that are helpful to all who work with hazardous materials. www.pace-workerhealth.org
- **Philadelphia Project on Occupational Safety and Health** is made up of unions, health and legal professionals working for a safe and protected workplace and the rights of injured workers. www.philaposh.org
- **Health, Safety and Environment Department of the United Steelworkers** assists local unions' health, safety and environment efforts through education and trainings and by strengthening regulations and standards. www.usw.org



To learn how our health and the environment are connected and about ways to protect our families and communities, visit our website at www.womenshealthandenvironment.org.

Endnotes

1. National Wildlife Federation: www.nwf.org/wildlife/pdfs/MercuryinPennsylvania.pdf.
2. Pennsylvania Conservation Voter Education League: www.protectpa.org/environmental-issues/15.asp#air.
3. Green Building Alliance LEED Benchmarking Data, Aug. 2006: www.gbapgh.org/MiscFiles/LEED%20Benchmark%20Handout%20October%202006.pdf