

Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), Pennsylvania Cancer Coalition (PCC):

Environmental Health Workgroup (EHWG)

1/14/25 Meeting #8

In attendance: 10

Fern Gilkerson (co-chair)

Amy Whittaker

Dani Wilson (co-chair)

Victor Alos Rullan

Andre Green

Danyelle Gibson

Ned Ketyer

Kadijah Mitchell

Aaron Makatura

Michelle Naccarati Chapkis

Meetings are usually held on the third Tuesdays of the month from 1:00pm-2:00pm. Any new and interested members referred to this workgroup must initially use the online form found on the [PCC website](#). They must also specifically request to join the [Environmental Health Workgroup](#). Click for the [PA Cancer Coalition website](#) and click for the [PA Cancer Control Plan](#). [Past meeting notes can be found here](#).

The EHWG Action Plan Document is on the [PCC Environmental Health Workgroup page](#).

During the meeting, members shared updates and resources and welcomed new members, who each selected a subcommittee to join. The Education and Policy Subcommittees are seeking volunteers to lead, with interested members encouraged to contact Dani and Fern. The workgroup will discuss the symposium at the next meeting in February, and a symposium planning subcommittee will be formed, for which interested members should also contact Dani and Fern.

General updates:

1. **April 8-10, 2025:** The Cancer and Environment Network of Southwestern PA (CENSWPA) and the University of Pittsburgh's School of Public Health will hold their annual environmental justice summit in Pittsburgh. This year, sessions will focus on Air Equity, Built Environment Conditions, Food Security, Land Equity, and Water Equity as well as environmental justice in practice sessions. Save the date and keep an eye on their website for updates: [Home - Cancer & Environment Network of SWPA](#).

2. **Senate Bill 1328:** Senator Robinson of Pennsylvania's 37th District will reintroduce Senate Bill 1328 (possibly under a different title), which mandates radon testing in public schools and actions for schools that fail to meet standards.
3. **Firefighters' Insurance Coverage:** Members are working on a bill to secure insurance coverage for firefighters exposed to carcinogens.
4. **Health Advisories:**
 - The Department of Health recently developed a health advisory on the health effects of environmental exposures. The Education Subcommittee will discuss the distribution of this advisory, including to school nurses.
 - In 2023, the Department of Health issued a health advisory on child health impacts related to fracking, including DNA impacts and increased childhood cancer rates. Studies show associations between living near fracking sites and small gestational age, asthma, and increased risk of lymphoma. [Oil and gas development poses specific health risks](#) and health providers are encouraged to learn about these associations.
 - In 2022, the Department of Health issued a [health advisory on PFAs](#).
5. **Project Echo:** Penn State held their first session in January, which was well-received. It was from [Project ECHO](#) of the NIH. There was a discussion in this meeting about bringing the presentation to the PCC via the EHWG.
6. **January 22, 2025:** Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania held a webinar titled "How the Environment Threatens Your Health and How to Talk to Your Doctor About It." [How the Environment Threatens Your Health and How to Talk to Your Doctor About It | PSR Pennsylvania](#)
7. **Community Health Impact Inquiry:** One member is looking for information on health impacts for communities living near Chester due to pollution from Chester. If anyone has further information, please share it at the next EHWG meeting or via email with Dani and Fern, who will ensure the member receives the information.
 - a. In the meantime, this [website](#) and [map](#) were shared in response to the question.

Policy Subcommittee Notes:

1. **Focus: Workplace Hazards for Firefighters, see example [here](#):**
 - Firefighting has been reclassified as a risk factor for cancer.
 - The subcommittee discussed workplace hazards for firefighters, specifically the environmental risk factors contributing to cancer.

2. Focus: Effects of Pesticides on Children:

- The focus is on the effects of pesticide exposure on children, considering their vulnerability to environmental toxins.

Discussion Points:

- Subcommittee members reviewed plan points, action steps, and discussions to date, emphasizing the need for a more focused approach targeting legislators and regulators.
- Subcommittee members discussed targeting professionals, medical communities, universities, and large study groups to raise awareness of environmental risk factors causing cancer.
- There is a need for legislative sponsors to support policy initiatives.

Next Steps:

- Collect existing data and resources for further analysis.
- Consider organizing an advocacy day in Harrisburg to engage with policymakers.
- Create two folders in a shared Google file: One for firefighter hazards and one for pesticide effects on children.
 - Subcommittee members will drop relevant resources into these folders.
 - The group will review the resources and create highlights lists.
 - Eventually, subcommittee members will decide how to utilize the information for sharing with the intended audience.

Education Subcommittee Notes:

1. Dissemination of Environmental Health Information:

- Subcommittee members discussed Chester Co Health Department's efforts in distributing environmental health information to medical professionals, the general public, and schools. These efforts align with the workgroup's goals for statewide implementation.

2. Fact Sheets for Medical Professionals:

- Suggestion was made to develop simple fact sheets for medical professionals as an initial step in the Action Plan.

3. Information Dissemination:

- Subcommittee members discussed how information is received, contrasting newsletter sign-ups with automatic information delivery methods.

4. EHP Toolkit:

- Subcommittee members discussed the Environmental Health Project's toolkit for healthcare providers, which offers Continuing Education Credits (CECs).

5. Health Equity in Education:

- Subcommittee members emphasized the importance of incorporating health equity into education efforts for the general public, not just within the policy subcommittee, noting that structural barriers need more than just fact sheets to be addressed.

6. Shared Resources:

- [Environmental Health Project Toolkit](#)
- [Cancer & Environment Network of SWPA Resources](#)

7. Future Plans:

- The subcommittee discussed organizing a joint webinar for healthcare professionals and the general public to further education efforts.