

Collaborative on Health and the Environment - Northwest (CHE-NW)
Meeting Notes
September 30, 2004
3:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Participants:

- *Chetana Archarya*, University of Washington, Center for Ecogenetics and Environmental Health, Community Outreach Program
- *Marnie Boardman*, Washington State Department of Health
- *Pat Butterfield*, University of Washington School of Nursing
- *Jackie Hunt Christensen*, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
- *Julie Corwin*, King County Public Health Department
- *Carol Dansereau*, Farmworker Pesticide Project
- *Kate Davies*, Antioch University
- *Sibyl Diver*, Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition
- *Elizabeth Davis*, League of Women Voters
- *Ticiang Diangson*, Seattle Public Utilities
- *Sally Goodwin*, family physician
- *Linn Gould*, Erda Environmental Services
- *Dietrich Hauge*, Antioch University
- *Gary Lichtenstein*, Antioch University
- *Teresa Mares*, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice
- *Suellen Mele*, Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation
- *Elise Miller*, Institute for Children's Environmental Health and CHE-NW coordinator
- *Jane Mountjoy-Venning*, Thurston County Health Department
- *Pat Noonan*, American Parkinson's Disease Association, Washington State Chapter
- *Maria Victoria Peeler*, Washington State Department of Ecology
- *Mary Salazar*, University of Washington
- *Marley Shoaf*, Cascadia Consulting
- *Pam Tazioli*, Breast Cancer Fund
- *Colleen Thumlert*, Cascadia Consulting
- *Lisa Younglove*, University of Washington

Notes

1) Science Update

Kate Davies, professor at Antioch University and leader of the CHE-NW Health and Environment Links Research Working Group, presented the preliminary findings of her research, in conjunction with Dietrich Hauge and Gary Lichtenstein, on the available data in Washington State on the links between chronic health problems and environmental pollution. The primary intention of this research is to collect, summarize and map the existing data and determine what gaps need to be addressed. In order to make the scope of the research manageable, Kate noted that they focused on health effects related to toxic exposures (rather than other environmental concerns such as smoking or alcohol) and excluded occupational health problems. Kate and her research associates reviewed the following health outcomes: asthma, cardiovascular disease, cancer, reproductive health,

birth defects and developmental delays and neurobehavioral problems. Their preliminary findings suggested the Washington-specific data on cancer was excellent, while information regarding neurobehavioral problems was almost non-existent. They also calculated the environmentally attributable fraction of health care costs for childhood cancers (leukemia and brain cancer, both of which are on the rise). Using a conservative assumption that 5% of these cancers are caused by exposure to toxic chemicals, they found that \$11.1 million will be spent in Washington State just on the children diagnosed with these cancers in 2001. The implication here is that if environmental pollution that contributes to these cancers is eliminated, then we would realize enormous economic savings, not to mention saving the emotional and social costs to the individuals, their families and communities.

Kate will write up a brief report on these preliminary findings in the next few weeks. She also plans to continue this research and keep updating the information on the proposed CHE-NW website when that is developed. Kate and others noted that this kind of data benefits all of our efforts to better protect public health in Washington State.

2) Updates from CHE-NW members

Participants reported on a variety of initiatives on local and state levels, including:

- undertaking the Environmental Health Needs Assessment program in Seattle
- working to reduce pesticide exposures to farm workers in the Yakima Valley
- educating child care providers about pesticides and lead
- fostering a program on environmental health and science at Cleveland High School
- developing cultural competency trainings on environmental justice issues
- organizing a hearing in Seattle on October 19th on phasing out PBDEs
- publicizing the Department of Ecology's video on pesticides in the face of industry opposition
- developing a stronger health tracking system in Washington
- recycling electronic goods
- and educating parents of young children in Thurston County about environmental health issues.

3) Presentations by representatives of health-affected groups

Elise reminded participants that CHE national was established in large part to bring together various health-affected groups concerned with environmental links to their respective diseases and disabilities, along with researchers and health care professionals, in order to work more effectively and collaboratively to address these concerns. In this context, Elise expressed her gratitude for having representatives from some health-affected groups in Washington at the meeting to discuss their efforts in this regard.

A) Pam Tazioli, director of the Breast Cancer Fund's (BCF's) new office in Seattle – Pam first noted that there are many toxic chemicals linked to breast cancer, including dioxins and various endocrine disrupting chemicals. Increasing chemical exposures in the last few decades are also likely the reason we are seeing dramatic increases in breast cancer. For example, only 1 in 22 women in 1940 were diagnosed with breast cancer, while that

ratio is now 1 in 7 in 2004. She also noted that the highest rates of breast cancer are found in Washington State.

BCF has been working with scientists and health care professionals to determine what chemicals contribute to breast cancer and how we can prevent those exposures. This year they published the report "The State of the Evidence" which concludes that exposure to synthetic chemicals and radiation has contributed more than previously thought to the rising incidence of breast cancer. This is available on their website: www.breastcancerfund.org. BCF is also working on the national Safe Cosmetics campaign which is working to eliminate toxic chemicals in cosmetics, which may also contribute to breast cancer.

Upcoming events in the Puget Sound Area include two showings of *Rachel's Daughters: Searching for the Causes of Breast Cancer*, a powerful and not-to-be missed film – Monday, October 18, 2004, 7:00 pm, Town Hall in Seattle and Thursday, October 21, 2004 at 7:00 p.m. at the Capitol Theater in Olympia. In addition, BCF is sponsoring *Climb Against the Odds* in July 2005, a climb up Mt. Ranier by breast cancer survivors and supporters, to raise awareness about environmental links to breast cancer and the need for prevention. For more information: www.breastcancerfund.org/Washington/ RSVP or call (206) 524-4405.

B) Pat Noonan, director of the Washington Chapter of the American Parkinson's Disease Association (APDA) – Pat first mentioned that though the national APDA has not focused that much on environmental pollution, prevention is a top priority in their Washington State activities. She noted that there are about 50,000 new diagnoses of Parkinson's each year, and that pesticides, solvents and heavy metals have now been linked to the disease. Sometimes combinations of heavy metals, such as lead, copper and iron, even at low levels, can significantly increase risk. The National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) has allocated \$20 million to identify environmental triggers along with identifying possible susceptible genes and gene-environment interactions that can lead to Parkinson's.

Upcoming events in the Seattle area include the 20th annual symposium for persons with Parkinson's, families and health professionals on Saturday, Nov. 6th at the Jerry M. Brockey Center at South Seattle Community College. For more information, see www.waparkinsons.org or call (206) 543-5369 or toll free at 1-888-400-2732.

Jackie Hunt Christensen, who was visiting from Minneapolis, MN, added to Pat's presentation by describing her own profound and moving experience of Parkinson's. She was diagnosed at age 32, the mother of two children, and believes that an acute exposure to pesticides triggered the disease in her. Though she has been valiant, dedicated and persistent, continuing to work as an environmental health advocate with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, she is now (at age 40) having to let go of much of the work that has been the focus of her professional life because of Parkinson's. Currently, she is working on a book of what the first year after her diagnosis was like and interviewing

colleagues in environmental health about their views of what it takes to build a movement.

Please note Robin Evans-Agnew with the American Lung Association of Washington was to speak on asthma, air particulates and actions being undertaken to address these issues. However, he was unable to attend at the last minute because of a grant deadline.

4) Next Steps

After some discussion about what we would like to discuss at the next meeting, the group decided that a focus on prioritizing environmental health issues based on emerging science and strategizing about policy priorities for 2005 in Washington State would be helpful. As usual, we will also have a science update and an opportunity for participants to highlight current and emerging initiatives.

Date For Next Meeting:

December 6, 2004 12:30 - 2:30 P.M.

at Antioch University in Seattle

The group also thought that we might focus a CHE-NW meeting on pesticides in February when Tyrone Hayes was in town for the 2nd Annual Environmental Health Lecture Series sponsored by the Seattle Biotech Legacy Foundation.