

BUILDING SAFE SCHOOLS:

Invisible Threats, Visible Actions



**A REPORT OF THE
Child Proofing Our Communities Campaign and
the Center for Health, Environment & Justice**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public schools are our community anchors. They are places that house and nurture our growing children. They are meeting places for communities, sporting events and extra-curricular activities. They employ public workers, and are funded by our tax dollars.

The federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act holds states accountable to improve academic achievement and heighten school safety. A specific provision, Title V, is intended to provide parents with the security of knowing that their child attends a safe school, and “to free students from those that are dangerous.”

However, many schools are not free of chemicals that pose invisible threats to the health of staff and students. Increasingly, schools strapped for much needed funds are constructing schools on cheap, contaminated property. And astonishingly, building schools on contaminated land is generally legal. In this report, we found that only 5 states in this country prohibit or restrict siting schools on or near hazardous or toxic waste sites.

The community groups featured in the case studies in this report were shocked to find that their state had no laws or regulations that prohibit a school from being built on toxic soil. These groups and the multitude of concerned parents that contact the Child Proofing Our Communities Campaign (CPOC) about the safety of their child’s school express the same astonishment at this brazen lack of protection for their child’s welfare. To truly protect the health of our nation’s children and halt this reckless trend, we are calling on local, state and federal legislators to pass laws that will prohibit future schools from being built on or near contaminated land in their communities.

In a state-by-state survey of the rules and regulations that apply to the siting of schools on contaminated property published in this report, we found:

- Only five (5) states have policies that prohibit or severely restrict siting schools on or near hazardous or toxic waste sites; nine (9) additional states have policies that prohibit



outright the siting of schools on or near sources of pollution or other hazards that pose a risk to children’s safety (such as proximity to heavy industry or natural environmental hazards);

- Twenty-four (24) states have no policies that require sponsors of new school projects to investigate or assess environmental hazards at potential school sites;
- Twenty-one (21) states have school siting policies that direct or suggest that school siting officials “avoid” siting schools on or near specified man-made or natural environmental hazards, or direct the school district to “consider” those hazards when selecting school sites;
- Only five (5) states have policies that specifically require sponsors of new school projects to undertake remediation or cleanup measures at contaminated school sites; and
- Twenty (20) states have no policies of any kind affecting the siting of schools in relation to environmental hazards, the investigation or assessment of potential school sites for environmental hazards, the clean up of contaminated sites, making information available to the public about potential school sites or providing some role for members of the public in the school siting process.

