



*Improving patient, workplace,  
and environmental health and  
safety in healthcare*

## Global Health and Safety Initiative

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### From the Executive Director's Desk

I want to bring to your attention the growing body of knowledge about the importance of environmental issues for the health of our population. This is particularly relevant today as we consider the cost of health care and healthcare reform, as well as the health of our nation and of our earth.

As reported in the New York Times (September 30, 2009), President Obama has authorized the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to develop regulations on greenhouse gas emissions from hundreds of power plants and large industrial facilities. According to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson the rules would cover the greenhouse gas emissions of 14,000 coal-burning power plants, refineries and big industrial complexes that produce most of the nation's greenhouse gas pollution. Small businesses, farms, large office buildings and other relatively small sources of carbon dioxide emissions would be exempt under the proposed rules. Bills on energy and greenhouse gas emission have also been introduced in Congress and the Administration is preparing to participate in the United Nations' talks on climate change in Copenhagen this December.

The EPA also plans to analyze and regulate six high-profile, widely used chemicals that have raised health concerns - *bisphenol A, or BPA*, found in hard, clear polycarbonate bottles including baby bottles; *phthalates*, which are used in vinyl and cosmetics (including IV bags and other medical equipment, fabrics, flooring, blinds and upholstery); *brominated flame retardants* added to electronics and other goods; *perfluorinated compounds* used in manufacturing non-stick coatings and food packaging; some *parafins*, used in lubricants, *and benzidine dyes and pigments*. Many scientists say these chemicals can mimic hormones and obstruct development of fetuses and children, as well as possibly cause reproductive problems, cancer or other health effects. EPA

Administrator Lisa Jackson called the nation's 1976 toxics law "inordinately cumbersome and time-consuming." As a result, she said the Obama Administration will promote a new chemical law in Congress in the coming months that puts the responsibility on industry to prove that its compounds are safe.

The New York Times has published a series on the worsening pollution of American waters, titled Toxic Waters (August - October, 2009). As reported on NPR's Fresh Air (October 19, 2009), Times writer Charles Duhigg used extensive state records to estimate that one in 10 Americans have been exposed to drinking water that contains dangerous chemicals or fails to meet a federal health benchmark in other ways, i.e. carcinogens in the tap water of major American cities and unsafe chemicals in drinking water wells.

A new Institutes of Medicine (IOM) study finds that smoke-free policies can reduce the risk of heart attack by up to 47 percent and significantly reduce the likelihood of other heart problems (IOM, October 15, 2009). The IOM report concludes that "secondhand-smoke exposure increases the risk of coronary heart disease and heart attacks and that smoking bans reduce heart attacks. Given the prevalence of heart attacks, and the resultant deaths, smoking bans can have a substantial impact on public health."

On October 15 the BBC reported on research from VU University Medical Centre in Amsterdam that found that living near green spaces has positive health benefits. The researchers looked at health records for 350,000 people across the Netherlands and concluded that anxiety disorders and depression were lower when people lived near green spaces and that there was a health benefit from green spaces with respect to coronary heart disease, neck, shoulder, back, wrist and hand complaints, diabetes, respiratory infections and asthma, migraine and vertigo, stomach bugs and urinary tract infections and unexplained physical symptoms as well.

And in a sobering note, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has released an updated summary of the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The report, Climate Change Science Compendium 2009, warns that many predictions that were at the upper ranges of 2007 IPCC forecasts are increasingly likely, and some events that were seen previously as probable over the long term are on the verge of occurring or are occurring already.

Clearly the environment can and does affect health ... and thus health care and health care costs. The Global Health and Safety Initiative is working with our partners and supporters to seek approaches that can be taken to improve the health and safety of patients, workers, the environment and our communities. Addressing environmental issues that affect the health of our population is a key element of this work and increasingly, is front and center in national and international discussion and policy.

Bob Eisenman, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Global Health and Safety Initiative

## Upcoming Events

More information about these and other events can be found on the Events Page of our website.

To tell us about an event, please contact GHSI staff at [info AT globalhealthsafety.org](mailto:info@globalhealthsafety.org).

- ▶ **HEALTHCARE DESIGN.09:** Attend the largest, most comprehensive HEALTHCARE DESIGN Conference ever. Don't miss out on over 60 educational sessions and 11 state of the art facility tours at HEALTHCARE DESIGN.09, in Orlando, Florida. From October 31-November 3, HEALTHCARE DESIGN.09 immerses you in a 4-day, solution-focused experience aimed at delivering successful outcomes for healthcare facilities now and into the future. [Register today](#).
- ▶ **GHSI Strategic Update Call:** On Tuesday, November 10, 10am Pacific / noon Central / 1pm Eastern, join Global Health and Safety Initiative Executive Director Dr. Robert Eisenman and other GHSI partners for a free live chat to discuss new releases from the Research Collaborative. Time will be set aside to answer questions from call participants. To join the free call, dial-in to 1-712-432-0800, and enter access code 717344#, a couple of minutes before the designated start time to ensure a prompt start to the call. Please also [RSVP online](#) to ensure you receive documents that may be referenced on the call. We hope that you can join us.
- ▶ **APHA Annual Meeting & Exposition:** The American Public Health Association's (APHA) 137th Annual Meeting and Exposition, "Water and Public Health," is set for November 7-11, 2009, in Philadelphia, PA. [Registration is now open](#). APHA's Annual Meeting and Exposition is the oldest and largest gathering of public health professionals in the world, attracting more than 13,000 national and international physicians, administrators, nurses, educators, researchers, epidemiologists, and related health specialists. APHA's meeting program addresses current and emerging health science, policy, and practice issues in an effort to prevent disease and promote health.
- ▶ **Greenbuild 2009:** [Greenbuild](#) will be in Phoenix, Arizona, November 11-13, 2009. The world's largest conference and expo dedicated to green building, Greenbuild hosts thousands of building professionals from all over the world for three days of educational sessions, renowned speakers, green building tours, special seminars, and networking events.

## What's New?

Here are a few of the latest developments from GHSI's workgroups, members, and NGO partners:

- ▶ **Pharos Database to be Released at Greenbuild 2009:** The Healthy Building Network will be opening up its Pharos database tools for public use at [Greenbuild](#) next month (November 2009). The Pharos tools include a building products library and a searchable chemicals and materials library that can be used for health systems and architects and designers wanting easily accessible reliable information about the environmental, health, and social justice issues associated with their products. Come visit Booth #2258 to learn more about Pharos and to subscribe and obtain access to these important tools, or visit the [Healthy Building Network website](#) for more information.
- ▶ **CleanMed Presentation Proposals due October 30:** The deadline to submit presentation proposals for CleanMed 2010 is October 30, 2009. The CleanMed 2010 conference is scheduled for May 11-13, 2010 in Baltimore. Download the Call for Presentations from the [CleanMed website](#).

CleanMed is the premier conference on environmental sustainability for the health care sector. The conference attracts key decision makers and leaders from across the sector, convening health care professionals, researchers, operations staff, purchasing professionals, engineers, architects and designers of professional buildings, and health care sector leadership.

► **Meetings in Washington Further Dialogue on Research and Dissemination Efforts:**

Staff of GHSI, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), and the GHSI/HCWH Research Collaborative at the University of Illinois at Chicago had productive meetings in Washington, DC in September with staff of Rep. Russ Carnahan (Missouri) and with managers of three agencies - OSHA, the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Follow-up efforts are now under way. In particular, following on the discussion with Rep. Carnahan's office, HCWH and GHSI are working to develop a legislative proposal for dissemination of best practices and research around innovations that can improve patient, worker and environmental safety in the health care sector. And HCWH, GHSI and The Center for Health Design submitted a proposal to AHRQ for a two-year project to disseminate best practices.

► **HCWH Challenges Hospitals to Reduce Meat Offerings by 20 Percent in "Balanced Menus Challenge":**

Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) has announced the "Balanced Menus Challenge," a voluntary commitment by healthcare institutions to reduce their meat offerings in patient meals and hospital cafeterias by 20 percent in 12 months. Balanced Menus is a climate change reduction strategy that also protects the effectiveness of antibiotics and promotes good nutrition. Hospitals are already participating in the national Balanced Menus Challenge, which was developed by HCWH's Healthy Food in Healthcare Initiative.

Most hospitals buy substantial amounts of meat, typically through large distributors who source from the US commodity beef, pork and poultry markets. US food production relies heavily on fossil fuels, and red meat production is particularly energy intensive as it requires significant inputs of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to grow crops for feed. The food system accounts for over 10 percent of overall energy use in the United States. Globally, livestock for meat and dairy production accounts for 18 percent of greenhouse gases, more than all of Earth's cars, trains, and planes combined.

"While food choice is distinctly personal, the healthcare community should be at the forefront in modeling a healthy food agenda for the nation," said Jamie Harvie, chair of the HCWH Healthy Food in Health Care Initiative. "Encouraging a reduced and sustainable meat diet is part of a primary prevention agenda to reduce the nation's chronic diet-related illnesses, but also contributes substantially to climate mitigation, clean air and water, and protection of the effectiveness of antibiotics." For more information, visit the [Balanced Menus section of the HCWH website](#).

► **Toxic Chemicals Found in Doctors and Nurses:** Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) in partnership with American Nurses Association (ANA) and Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) have released the "Hazardous Chemicals In Health Care" report,

detailing the first investigation ever of chemicals found in the bodies of health care professionals. The inquiry found that all of the 20 participants had toxic chemicals associated with health care in their bodies. Each participant had at least 24 individual chemicals present, four of which are on the recently released Environmental Protection Agency list of priority chemicals for regulation. These chemicals are all associated with chronic illness and physical disorders. [Read the press release](#) and [download the report](#).

- ▶ **Senator Franken Introduces Safe Patient Handling Bill:** Senator Al Franken (D-MN) has introduced S. 1788, the Nurse and Health Care Worker Protection Act of 2009, a bill to direct the Secretary of Labor to issue an occupational safety and health standard to reduce injuries to patients, direct-care registered nurses, and all other health care workers by establishing a safe patient handling and injury prevention standard. The bill is a companion to HR 2381, the Nurse and Health Care Worker Protection Act of 2009 introduced by Rep. John Conyers (D-MI). "Nurses and health-care workers shouldn't have to sacrifice their safety and their livelihood to help others," Franken said in a statement. "Especially when many of these injuries could be prevented." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, RNs get injured at a higher rate than laborers, movers and truck drivers from repositioning, moving and lifting patients. For more on this bill, [visit govtrack.us](#).
- ▶ **Health Impact Project Launch:** The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts announced the launch of the [Health Impact Project](#), a 4.5-year national initiative designed to promote the use of health impact assessments (HIAs) as a decision-making tool for policymakers. HIAs are a data-driven approach that identify the health consequences of new policies and develop practical strategies to improve their health benefits and minimize adverse effects. The Health Impact Project is accepting proposals for up to 15 HIA demonstrations ranging from \$25,000 to \$150,000. [Read the Reuters article](#).

## Workgroups

Interested in joining the GHSI and participating in one or more of these workgroups? Please contact GHSI staff at [info AT globalhealthsafety.org](mailto:info@AT.globalhealthsafety.org), and we'll put you in touch with the appropriate workgroup leader to get you started.

- ▶ The focus of the [Research Collaborative](#) is to help provide funding and facilitate research that links better building designs, greener and safer materials and products and improved approaches to operations that will reduce the hazards associated with negative health affects.
- ▶ The [Sustainable Operations](#) workgroup strategy focuses on the acceleration of best practices for operations among the GHSI partners and the entire healthcare sector, including Environmental Services, Hazardous Materials, Safety, Dietary/Food Services, and Risk Management.
- ▶ The [Healthy Purchasing](#) workgroup will use the collective purchasing power of participating hospital systems and their Group Purchasing Organizations (GPOs) to transform the market for healthcare products and technologies that meet the goals of patient and workplace safety and environmental sustainability, including identifying

priority products and developing a database of environmentally preferable product specifications.

- ▶ The **Built Environment** workgroup will provide access to an array of "best practices" to implement strategies that augment patient safety and workplace safety. These strategies also will maximize the sector's environmental performance while reducing healthcare's eco-footprint and contributing to the health and safety of patients and workers. The materials subcommittee of the Built Environment workgroup will provide information and tools, such as the Pharos database tool, to help systems procure building products that are healthier for patients, staff and the community.

## Have Questions?

Visit our [GHSI website](#) for frequent program updates and information about upcoming meetings and events. If you have direct questions about becoming a member of GHSI, please contact GHSI Executive Director, Bob Eisenman, Ph.D., at 510-418-6197 or [beisenman AT globalhealthsafety.org](mailto:beisenman@globalhealthsafety.org).

Thank you for your help. Working together through GHSI, we can transform the health care industry and improve patient, worker, workplace and environmental safety.

To read prior issues of the GHSI Online Newsletter, go to the [GHSI press room](#).

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