

Standards to Receive the Certificate of Achievement

Under [Act 125](#) Vermont schools can annually apply for a [Certificate of Achievement](#) as recognition of their efforts to improve air quality and reduce exposures to hazardous materials.

The standards to receive the certificate include the following:

- Adopting an [environmental health management plan & policy](#)
- Adopting [purchasing policies](#) that specify non-toxic or least-toxic materials
- Adopting an [integrated pest management and control program](#) to reduce use and exposure of pesticides
- Completing an annual workshop approved by the Department of Health
- Demonstrating exemplary progress in four of nine environmental health areas.

Non-toxic or Least-toxic Supplies and Materials

Non-toxic or least-toxic supplies and materials include environmentally preferable products that may have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products that serve the same purpose.

Many substances—in large enough quantities—can be toxic. Children and other susceptible populations can be especially affected by some substances, even in very small doses. The presence of a harmful substance does not necessarily mean that people are being harmed. The effect depends on several factors including if and how the substance is entering the body.

In addition, what would usually be considered safe for nearly all of a school's occupants may cause a health effect in one person. And even non-toxic or least-toxic substances may sometimes cause or contribute to health effects.

Schools have a variety of ventilation systems, which means appropriate supplies or materials may vary from one school to another. Therefore, a school should purchase what is appropriate for its particular setting. Be sure to follow all directions and precautions on the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for all products to ensure that the risk of potential health effects is minimized.

Consult our [indoor air quality fact sheets](#) and our [Safety Data Sheet \(SDS\) resources](#) for more information. You will also find a lot of useful information at the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's [ToxFAQs: Frequently Asked Questions about Contaminants](#).

The following websites offer information about environmentally preferable products:

- [Environmentally Preferable Products Procurement Program](#)
- [EPA Environmentally Preferable Purchasing website](#)

Important note: While the products listed on these sites may be environmentally preferable to other products, they still may cause health effects for some, including children.

The following publications from the Consumer Product Safety Commission also offer useful information:

- [What You Should Know About Using Paint Strippers](#)
- [An Update on Formaldehyde](#)
- [Healthy Indoor Painting Practices](#)

Health Criteria for Purchase and Use

Schools may use environmental health criteria when determining which materials to buy or use in school construction or operations. **Safety Data Sheets (SDS)** contain information that may be helpful. When considering whether to purchase a material or product, pay particular attention to what the MSDS says about the following:

- Health hazard rating (0 – 4, with 0 meaning “normal materials” or insignificant and 4 meaning potentially “deadly”)
- Normal form of exposure (such as inhalation)
- Signs and symptoms of acute or chronic overexposure
- If any ingredient is deemed by the government or any reputable organization as being carcinogenic (cancer-causing)
- Any special spill or handling precautions
- Whether any special ventilation is required (e.g. general, mechanical, local exhaust); whether any protective equipment or clothing is needed

Healthy Schools Partnering with the State of Vermont

The Purchasing and Contract Administration Division of the Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) is authorized through legislation to cooperate with political subdivisions—public schools, colleges, municipalities. Services available include writing state purchasing contracts to include schools, and acting as a resource for purchasing concerns.

- [Vermont Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Program](#)
- [Environmentally Preferable Cleaning Chemical Contracts](#)

Envision Workshops on Environmental Health and Other Technical Assistance

The Health Department offers training workshops to school personnel teams that are based on the Environmental Protection Agency’s [Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools](#) program.

The Health Department offers technical help and troubleshooting assistance for anyone in the school community who has concerns about indoor air quality. Call 800-439-8550.

Individuals with symptoms or signs of illness should immediately consult with their health care provider, as well as with the school nurse. Health professionals may wish to consult the [EPA’s Guide to Indoor Air Quality](#).