

## Tools For Schools (TFS)/Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

Volume 1: March 2008

*By JoAnn Duncan*

*TFS Coordinator*

In recent years, indoor air pollution has ranked among the top five environmental risks to public health. Poor IAQ in our homes and in our schools has the potential to exacerbate health problems for students, teachers and staff. Illness leads to reduced productivity and absenteeism. Good IAQ contributes to a favorable learning environment for students, performance of teachers and staff, and a sense of comfort, health and well being. These elements combine to assist a school in its core mission – educating children.

In 2003, Connecticut passed legislation to help ensure that IAQ in CT schools would be monitored and improved. Public Act 03-220 requires local school boards to adopt and implement IAQ programs in school buildings. Westport has chosen to implement the TFS program which the state recommends as the best program to monitor IAQ in our schools. Westport is in its first year participating in the Tools for Schools (TFS) program. The Board of Education understands that proper maintenance of indoor air encompasses safety and stewardship of our investment in the students, staff and facilities.

I have been employed by the school system to be the Coordinator of the TFS Program in Westport because of my skills in coordinating the program in Ridgefield, CT. Under my leadership, Ridgefield won the 2007 EPA Excellence Award. I have also been a speaker at the National EPA/TFS symposium on “*How to Sustain Your TFS program*”.

My role is to coordinate the program and all eight TFS teams’ activities in Westport to ensure uniformity throughout the district, provide consistency among the schools, provide education and communication, ensure sustainability of the program and assist in the overall district wide activities of the TFS teams. All of the initial Westport TFS meetings and walkthroughs were completed by the end of March 2008.

“Tools for Schools” was developed and sponsored by the EPA, American Lung Association, National Education Association, PTA and other organizations. A key component of the TFS program is an action kit to systematically and thoroughly address IAQ concerns in our school buildings by teams at each school which are comprised of one school administrator, the school nurse, a teacher, the head custodian and a parent. Some TFS teams have two parents, teachers and administrators.

Trained by persons from the State Department of Health and OSHA, the teams have learned how to collect data from each school and report findings using the TFS model. Each team meets to walk through its building looking for any IAQ concerns such as mold growth, leaks/moisture concerns, dust, pests, pesticide use, improper chemical use, unusual odors, cleanliness of the building, thermal comfort, and objects obstructing air flow in the HVAC system. The TFS teams also gather information on these topics through electronic surveys of staff.

In the spring, the TFS teams will meet to review and follow up all items found on the Jan/Feb/March walkthroughs. They will also discuss how to improve the program for the following year. Each team will be instrumental in developing the action plan for summer plant work in its building based on the data from the spring walkthrough and the remaining items from the winter. They will meet again each year in Sept/Oct to do a focused walkthrough of the building. Education and communication are ongoing components to achieve success with this program.

Throughout the year if a problem arises, the TFS teams will be there to see it through to its resolution. Most issues can be addressed in a timely manner, with little effort or expense. Correcting problems that require the expenditure of significant funds or personnel time will be scheduled by the Assistant Superintendent for Business based on priority. The district has fully embraced the program and each TFS team has had a very productive start to this ongoing process.

The TFS program has shined a public light on what we already know: all of us benefit from a safe, healthy environment for learning.

**TFS Team Members:**

**Administrator(s):**

**Nurse:**

**Teacher(s):**

**Head Custodian:**

**Parent(s):**

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The Westport Public Schools are in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of using the TFS program to monitor the IAQ in all 8 schools. We have made great strides in improving IAQ in the schools by improving IAQ education, communication and consistency throughout the district. All 8 TFS teams have completed their fall meetings and focused walkthroughs of their school. The minutes and action items (spreadsheet) from each meeting and walkthrough are stored in the TFS binder that is kept at each school with the TFS kit. This binder is the running record of all TFS activities in the building.

One large initiative is the phasing out of all old cleaning chemicals and replacing them with *Green Seal Certified* products. Some non-Green products still exist in the district for special uses and heavy duty cleaning or disinfecting when needed when school is not in session. All products containing bleach are being eliminated as are items with fragrances. The district is moving toward a *fragrance free* environment. There should be no personal care products, cleaners, lotions, soaps, wipes or air fresheners brought in from home. Only products provided by Westport Public Schools should be used in the classrooms. Classrooms with sinks should have soap dispensers filled with Westport approved liquid soap.

All cleaning rags and mops are being replaced with micro-fiber rags and mops. This will decrease the need for wet dusting agents and will keep the dust collected rather than making it airborne. This keeps the air cleaner and the surfaces free of dust for a longer period of time all without the use of chemicals.

All teachers have been given a Green Seal Certified product known as Butcher's G-Force to clean surfaces in their classrooms if they choose to do so. This is an all purpose peroxide based surface cleaner. They should clean the surfaces using only this product with paper towels. They have also each been given a micro-fiber rag that is best used for cleaning the white boards and computer keyboards. This can be accomplished with a dry or damp rag. Dirt, dust and even microbes are attracted by and adhere to the micro-fiber material. Each school has been equipped with a special washing machine to clean the micro-fiber rags in house. Teachers have a protocol to follow to get their rag laundered and receive a clean rag when needed.

Another improvement is that all preventive maintenance is in place including the Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems. Filter changes are being done on a schedule several times per year at each school.

Information about the TFS program, IAQ, district policies and procedures and past newsletters can be found on the school website at [www.westport.k12.ct.us](http://www.westport.k12.ct.us). The annual TFS calendar and team member list is also on the site (*you can go to this list to see the team members at your school*). Each school has a team made up of an administrator, teacher, nurse, parent and head custodian. These teams meet regularly and follow the procedures of the TFS program.

In conclusion, The Westport Public School district has shown its commitment to implementing and sustaining the TFS program. The program in Westport is very organized, consistent, proactive, able to act quickly and appropriately to all IAQ concerns, and communicates through TFS team meetings, email, newsletter articles and the TFS section of the district website.

The TFS Program has educated the building inhabitants to be proactive participants to help us ensure the continued improvement of IAQ in the Westport Public Schools.

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