



**National Center for
Healthy Housing**

Healthy Housing Connections



Healthy Housing Connections November 2010

On October 13-15, 2010, Dr. Dave Jacobs and I had the distinct pleasure of representing the National Center for Healthy Housing and the U.S. at an international meeting sponsored by the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting spearheaded the development of "international guidance on healthy housing."

Over 40 experts from 18 countries participated in the meeting. During the meeting, representatives from both developing and developed countries drew up a "road map" for moving ahead on the development of guidelines that explicitly protect and advance the public health.

The ultimate work product will be a WHO Guideline on Healthy Housing, which will help identify healthy choices in housing retrofits, construction and design, and urban design; and that will inform policy at all levels.

The WHO guideline development process is anchored in a systematic and transparent review of scientific evidence. As a next step in the process, the experts will develop "key questions" that can be explored through the systematic review. Findings will be peer reviewed, formulated as guidance, and then subject to examination by WHO's Guidelines Review Committee.

"Housing changes are accelerating for many reasons - to conserve energy in the face of climate change, address needs of a rapidly urbanizing global population, prevention of homelessness and slum growth, and other factors," the participants said in a closing statement.

Most of the world's population growth over the next 20 years will occur in low and middle income cities; nearly 40 percent of urban growth today is in unhealthy slum housing. Additionally, many countries have initiated programs to modify their existing housing stock to make homes more energy efficient and more resilient in the face of climate change.

There is a clear need and opportunity for governments and others to promote health in the course of making investments in housing. International guidance on healthy housing would enable action that is scientifically based and protects and advances the public health.

In This Issue:

Working for Stronger Healthy Housing Codes
The Journal of Public Health Management and Practices
Healthcare Reform and Its Impact on Healthy Housing
New Blog Focuses on IPM in Multifamily Housing

Main Feature:

Working for Stronger Healthy Housing Codes

Maxine West thought she had found a nice home for her family when she rented the four bedroom house in Wilson County, Tennessee. On the surface, the property appeared in good condition and the price was reasonable. So in the winter of 2007, Maxine and her three children, Austin, Kelsey and Josh moved into the property with plans to stay indefinitely.

At first, the Wests were pleased with their new home, but it didn't take long for the thinly masked problems to surface. Just six months into the lease, Maxine noticed that the shower leaked, causing water to escape into the bathroom floor and shower walls. The water ultimately forced the shower to crack, revealing a pervasive mold problem.

Maxine was aware that she and her children had been suffering from constant allergy symptoms including difficulty breathing. The effects were most severe in Austin, who has been diagnosed with Bronchopulmonary Dysplasia (BPD). "I knew that my children were suffering, but I couldn't identify why or prove that it was the condition of the house that was causing our health problems," said Maxine. "I too was experiencing the constant sore throat, itchy eyes and stuffy nose, but our symptoms were bearable so we just tried to fight through it."

Later, Maxine discovered that the property had an open sewer line that had been leaking into the ground around the house — the yard where her children played. Horrified at the conditions she and her family were living in, Maxine sent a certified letter to her landlord notifying him of the cracked shower, the mold, and the faulty septic system.

The letter went unacknowledged, and Maxine decided she would just make plans to move out at the end of her lease. But, before she had the chance to move out, her air conditioning broke in the middle of the summer. At this point, she and her children left the house.

After just two weeks living in a new environment, her son's health significantly improved, confirming to Maxine that the unhealthy conditions in her home were making her family sick.

In August 2010, Maxine filed a suit against her landlord in small claims court, citing violations of Tennessee Code, Title 66, Chapter 28, Uniform Residential Landlord and Tenant Act which addresses rental premises unfit for habitation. "Landlords should be held accountable for keeping their properties safe and healthy," explained Maxine of her decision to sue.

"According to Tennessee Code, Chapter 1200-1-2 provisions, my landlord is guilty of 7 different housing violations including damp areas consumed with mold and faulty septic waste systems," said Maxine.

But, Maxine lost her case due to enforcement regulations and loopholes. Tennessee law states that the city agency responsible for creating building codes is also responsible for enforcing them, meaning individual tenants cannot sue landlords for violations. But, when Maxine contacted Mount Juliet City government, she learned that the Tennessee Code, Chapter 1200-1-2 is not effective countywide— only in the city of Mount Juliet. The home was outside the city's jurisdiction. Furthermore, when she contacted the codes department in the county, Maxine learned that it only inspects new developments.

Although she has moved out of the home and into a new home, she is continuing her fight.

"I want to make certain that (the landlord) is not allowed to re-lease the property until the house is in proper living conditions," said Maxine. "I'm trying to protect future tenants who may live there so they do not go through what my family has been through nor face the health problems that could arise from residing at my soon to be previous rental." Sadly, shortly after Maxine's departure, the rental property was advertised on Craigslist.

Stories like Maxine's are the reason that legislation like the Community Building Code Administration Grant Act of 2009 (S. 970, H.R. 2246) needs to be passed immediately. This Bill would require the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to award competitive grants to qualified local building code enforcement departments to increase staffing, provide training and generally strengthen the code administration process.

In the meantime, NCHH is working with our partners in the National Safe & Healthy Housing Coalition to amend the International Code Council (ICC) model housing and building codes to strengthen its public health protections. At the annual meeting of the International Code Council (ICC) on October 25 in Charlotte NC, ICC

members declined to add to the property maintenance code (IPMC) healthy housing advocates' proposals for (1) a requirement to repair or replace moldy building materials, (2) a requirement to use state-approved pest management professionals to correct a pest infestation, (3) a clear definition of "sanitary" and strengthened definition of "infestation," and (4) a new chapter codifying several basic health and safety standards. ICC members also rejected the IPMC Committee's prior decisions to include lead-safe work practice and CO alarm requirements in the property maintenance code. These votes reflected larger political issues between some government agencies and the building industry among others. NCHH and other healthy housing advocates must renew efforts to educate and engage local and state building officials.

But strengthening codes is only half of the solution. We also need to build a means for officials at the local level to adopt these codes and to systematically enforce them.

Research

The Journal of Public Health Management and Practice

The September/October issue of The Journal of Public Health Management and Practice is devoted to healthy housing! The National Center for Healthy Housing played a key role writing and coordinating several of the manuscripts with the help and support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many co-authors contributed significantly to this accomplishment by lending their time and expertise. Thanks to everyone who contributed to the publication. All of the articles can be downloaded for free:

<http://journals.lww.com/jphmp/toc/2010/09001#-1750774083ere>.

Here is a listing of some of the key titles:

A Systematic Review of Housing Interventions and Health: Introduction, Methods, and Summary Findings

Jacobs, David E.; Brown, Mary Jean; Baeder, Andrea; Sucosky, Marissa Scalia; Margolis, Stephen; Hershovitz, Jerry; Kolb, Laura; Morley, Rebecca L.

Housing Interventions and Control of Health-Related Chemical Agents: A Review of the Evidence Sandel, Megan; Baeder, Andrea; Bradman, Asa; Hughes, Jack; Mitchell, Clifford; Shaughnessy, Richard; Takaro, Tim K.; Jacobs, David E.

Housing Interventions and Control of Injury-Related Structural Deficiencies: A Review of the Evidence DiGuiseppi, Carolyn; Jacobs, David E.; Phelan, Kieran J.; Mickalide, Angela D.; Ormandy, David

Journal of Public Health Management & Practice. 16(5):S34-S43, September/October 2010.Housing Interventions at the Neighborhood Level and Health: A Review of the Evidence Lindberg, Ruth A.; Shenassa, Edmond D.; Acevedo-Garcia, Dolores; Popkin, Susan J.; Villaveces, Andrés; Morley, Rebecca L.

Healthy Energy-Efficient Housing: Using a One-Touch Approach to Maximize Public Health, Energy, and Housing Programs and Policies Kuholski, Kate; Tohn, Ellen; Morley, Rebecca

National Healthy Homes Training Center and Network: Building Capacity for Healthy Homes Neltner, Tom

Policy

Healthcare Reform and Its Impact on Healthy Housing

The landmark health care reform bill passed in 2010 (the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act), launched three new programs of importance to the healthy homes community. Each offers state and local government agencies and nonprofits an opportunity to implement healthy homes programming as part of a broader community health initiative. The time is now to connect with your national organizations, state government health leaders, and partners from other agencies, because federal and state agencies are actively deciding which new and existing health programs will receive these new federal funds. NCHH developed a short briefing document to help healthy homes proponents understand several of the key bill provisions and ways to get involved.

Read NCHH's Brief [Healthcare Reform and Healthy Housing: Opportunities for Action](#).

Training

New Blog Focuses on IPM in Multifamily Housing

A new blog has been created to facilitate information sharing among people working on IPM in Multifamily housing. The goal is for followers to network with each other through commenting on posts—sharing success stories and resources they find helpful. Most of the information on the blog will be pertinent to anyone working in low-income, multifamily housing. For example, the focus next month will be on pest control in hoarded homes. Residents may find the resources at www.stoppests.org to better meet their needs.

Ask NCHH

Q: I am concerned that the EPA rule is not being enforced in my community. How can I help?

A: Anyone can help enforce the EPA rule by being eyes and ears and documenting violations of the rule. NCHH has developed an enforcement checklist that can be used by community organizations, agencies, consumers, or even certified renovators who are aware of other contractors that are flagrantly disregarding the rule. Click here for the enforcement checklist: <http://tinyurl.com/2cdzlc7>. EPA has a duty to investigate tips and complaints, but can not do so unless the agency receives some specific details.

Healthy Housing in the News

Hemp Homes are Cutting Edge of Green Building
USA Today
Wendy Koch
September 12, 2010

Hemp is turning a new leaf. The plant fiber, used to make the sails that took Christopher Columbus' ships to the New World, is now a building material. In Asheville, N.C., a home built with thick hemp walls was completed this summer and two more are in the works.

Dozens of hemp homes have been built in Europe in the past two decades, but they're new to the United States, says David Madera, co-founder of Hemp Technologies, a company that supplied the mixture of ground-up hemp stalks, lime and water.

(SNIP)

Its new use reflects an increasing effort to make U.S. homes not only energy-efficient but also healthier. Madera and other proponents say hemp-filled walls are non-toxic, mildew-resistant, pest-free and flame-resistant. The home's bathroom has efficient lighting and water-conserving plumbing fixtures.

"There is a growing interest in less toxic building materials, says Peter Ashley, director of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control.

"The potential health benefits are significant," he says, citing a recent study of a Seattle public housing complex that saw residents' health improve after their homes got a green makeover. A 3,000 square-foot home with thick hemp walls was completed this summer in Asheville, N.C.

The U.S. government has not taken a "systemic approach" to studying chemicals in homes and instead addresses problems such as asbestos, lead, arsenic and formaldehyde only after people get sick, says Rebecca Morley, executive director of the National Center for Healthy Housing, a private research group. She says green building so far has focused mostly on the environment, not the health of the people inside.

Ashley agrees that federal attention has been "sporadic," but says an interagency group began meeting last year to tackle the issue more broadly. He says HUD is funding more research on the health and environmental benefits of eco-friendly homes.

Some green-rating programs, such as the one run by the private U.S. Green Building Council, give points for indoor air quality.

"We are taking the next step in green building," says Anthony Brenner, a home designer with Push Design who created Asheville's first hemp home. "We're trying to develop a system that's more health-based."

[Click here](#) to read the full article.

Upcoming Events

2011 National Conference, February 8 – 11, 2011 Miami, Florida. This conference combines the indoor environmental health & technologies conference and the lead and healthy homes grantees conference. Learn More: <http://www.healthyhousingconferences.com/website/files/2011-National-Brochure.pdf>.

2011 National Healthy Homes Conference, On June 20-23 in Denver, CO. The housing industry's most comprehensive, progressive, and educational forum on the issue of healthy, safe and sustainable homes. Learn More: <http://www.healthyhomesconference.org/>.

10th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, February 3-5, 2011, Charlotte, NC
www.livablecities.org/conferences/forthcoming-conferences/78-48th-conference-in-charleston.html

Be sure to follow NCHH on Twitter! <http://twitter.com/NCHH>.

About NCHH

The National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation based in Columbia, Maryland, dedicated to creating healthier homes for children through practical and proven steps. NCHH conducts research on a broad array of housing-related health issues, including mold, radon, asthma triggers, and the promotion of green and healthy building. Additionally, NCHH engages in policy and training activities to promote decent, safe, and affordable housing in the United States.

NCHH anchors the National Healthy Homes Training Center, which is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since its inception, over 3,000 health and housing practitioners have attended the Training Center. If you are interested in learning more about NCHH or supporting our work or have ideas or comments on our newsletter, please contact Phillip Dodge, Marketing & Development Officer at (443) 539-4168 or pdodge@nchh.org.

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