

EPA REGION 6 – SOUTH CENTRAL

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Dallas, Texas 75270

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HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Serving Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma,
New Mexico, Texas and 66 Tribes

HELPING KIDS LEARN IN A POLLUTION FREE ENVIRONMENT

What is Groundwater and How Can It Be Polluted?

Groundwater is a resource found under the earth's surface. Most groundwater comes from rain and melting snow soaking into the ground. Water fills the spaces between rocks and soils, making an "aquifer." About half of our nation's drinking water comes from groundwater. Most is supplied through public drinking water systems. But many families rely on private, household wells and use groundwater as their source of fresh water. Groundwater — its depth from the surface, quality for drinking water, and chance of being polluted — varies from place to place. Generally, the deeper the well, the better the groundwater. The amount of new water flowing into the area also affects groundwater quality. Groundwater may contain some natural impurities or contaminants, even with no human activity or pollution. Natural contaminants can come from many conditions in the watershed or in the ground. Water moving through underground rocks and soils may pick up magnesium, calcium, and chlorides. Some groundwater naturally contains dissolved elements such as arsenic, boron, selenium, or radon, a gas formed by the natural breakdown of radioactive uranium in soil. Whether these natural contaminants are health problems depends on the amount of the substance present. In addition to natural contaminants, groundwater is often polluted by human activities such as:

- Improper use of fertilizers, animal manures, herbicides, insecticides, and pesticides.
- Improperly built or poorly located and/or maintained septic systems for household wastewater.
- Leaking or abandoned underground storage tanks and piping.
- Stormwater drains that discharge chemicals to groundwater.
- Improper disposal or storage of wastes.
- Chemical spills at local industrial sites.

Suburban growth is bringing businesses, factories, and industry (and potential sources of pollution) into once rural areas where families often rely on household wells. Growth is also pushing new home developments onto the edge of rural and agricultural areas. Often municipal water and sewer lines do not extend to these areas. Many new houses rely on wells and septic tanks. But the people buying them may not have any experience using these systems. Most U.S. groundwater is safe for human use. However, groundwater contamination has been found in all 50 states, so well owners have reason to be vigilant in protecting their water supplies. Well owners need to be aware of potential health problems. They need to test their water regularly and maintain their wells to safeguard their families' drinking water.

May is Asthma Awareness Month—a time to educate friends, family, and patients about asthma and promote awareness about how this serious, sometimes life-threatening, chronic respiratory disease can be controlled. During Asthma Awareness Month, EPA provides ready-to-use tools and resources for use promoting asthma awareness in your community. These tools can be found at our [Asthma Awareness Month webpage](#)

April is Food Waste Recovery Month! What is Wasted Food and Where Does it Come From?

The term “**wasted food**” describes food that was not used for its intended purpose and is managed in a variety of ways described below. The EPA uses the overarching term “wasted food” instead of “food waste” for food that was not used for its intended purpose, because it conveys that a valuable resource is being wasted, whereas “food waste” implies that the food no longer has value and needs to be managed as waste.

- **Wasted food** is an overarching term to describe food that was not used for its intended purpose and is managed in a variety of ways, such as donation to feed people, creation of animal feed, composting, anaerobic digestion, or disposal in landfills or combustion facilities. Examples include unsold food from retail stores; plate waste, uneaten prepared food, or kitchen trimmings from restaurants, cafeterias, and households; or by-products from food and beverage processing facilities. The term wasted food can be used to refer to both excess food and food waste.
- **Excess food** (or surplus food) often refers to food that is donated to feed people.
- **Food waste** often refers to food not ultimately consumed by humans that is discarded or recycled, such as plate waste (i.e., food that has been served, but not eaten), spoiled food, or peels and rinds considered inedible. Food waste occurs at the retail, food service, and residential levels and is managed by landfill; controlled combustion; sewer; litter, discards, and refuse; co/anaerobic digestion; compost/aerobic digestion; and land application.
- **Food loss** often refers to unused product from the agricultural sector, such as unharvested crops. Food loss occurs from production up to (and not including) the retail level.

The EPA encourages anyone managing wasted food to reference the [Wasted Food Scale](#), which prioritizes actions that can be taken to prevent and divert wasted food from disposal. The most preferred pathways – prevent wasted food, donate, and upcycle food – offer the most benefits to the environment, to communities, and to a circular economy.

What is the Mission of the EPA?

The mission of the EPA is to protect human health and the environment. The EPA works to ensure that:

- Americans have clean air, land, and water.
- National efforts to reduce environmental risks are based on the best available scientific information.
- Federal laws protecting human health and the environment are administered and enforced fairly, effectively and as Congress intended.
- Environmental stewardship is integral to U.S. policies concerning natural resources, human health, economic growth, energy, transportation, agriculture, industry, and international trade, and these factors are similarly considered in establishing environmental policy.
- All parts of society--communities, individuals, businesses, and state, local, and tribal governments--have access to accurate information sufficient to effectively participate in managing human health and environmental risks.
- Contaminated lands and toxic sites are cleaned up by potentially responsible parties and revitalized.
- Chemicals in the marketplace are reviewed for safety.

EPA Region 6 Lead Awareness Curriculum and Training

As part of the Biden-Harris Administration's efforts to protect communities from childhood lead exposure from lead-based paint and advance environmental justice, the EPA is announcing a series of free educational sessions on the dangers of lead from lead-based paint and ways to reduce and prevent lead exposure. The free educational series has become a massive success within communities of Region 6, and the region is planning additional sessions for Spring 2024. These sessions are based on the [Lead Awareness Curriculum](#), an adaptable resource to protect communities from potential lead exposure. There will be sessions held in both English and Spanish. To find dates, times, and locations for upcoming sessions, visit <https://www.epa.gov/lead/community-lead-awareness-sessions>. If you are interested in learning more about Region 6 Community Lead Awareness, contact Piper Fisher at fisher.piper@epa.gov or Chelsea Perry at perry.chelsea@epa.gov.

Air Quality Awareness Week 2024 is May 6-10!

The EPA is partnering with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. National Park Service, U.S. Department of Energy, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as state, local, and Tribal agencies to share information with the public about efforts to protect and improve air quality. This week also includes World Asthma Day on Tuesday, May 7, 2024.

The theme for this year is “**Knowing Your Air.**” Air Quality Awareness Week highlights resources that increase air quality awareness and encourages people to act and incorporate air quality knowledge into their daily living. This year, resources and activities that are especially useful for students and teachers will be featured throughout our Air Quality Awareness Week webpages.

Air Quality Awareness Week provides an opportunity for people to learn about what causes poor air quality and how people can prepare for and respond to events and environments with poor air quality – not just during the month of May, but year-round! Find out more at <https://www.epa.gov/air-quality/air-quality-awareness-week>

Fix a Leak Week – Leaks Can Run, but They Can't Hide

Are you ready to chase down leaks? Household leaks can waste nearly 1 trillion gallons of water annually nationwide, so each year we hunt down the drips during Fix a Leak Week. Mark your calendars for the EPA's annual Fix a Leak Week, March 18 through 24, 2024—but remember that you can find and fix leaks inside and outside your home to save valuable water and money all year long.

From family fun runs to leak detection contests to WaterSense demonstrations, Fix a Leak Week events happen from coast to coast and are all geared to teach you how to find and fix household leaks. See our [Event map](#). Learn how to find and fix leaks during Fix a Leak Week. It's as easy as 1-2-3. Find out more at <https://www.epa.gov/watersense/fix-leak-week>

What Is Environmental Education?

Environmental education is a process that allows individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem solving, and take action to improve the environment. As a result, individuals develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues and have the skills to make informed and responsible decisions.

The components of environmental education are:

- **Awareness and sensitivity** to the environment and environmental challenges.
- **Knowledge and understanding** of the environment and environmental challenges.

- **Attitudes** of concern for the environment and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality.
- **Skills** to identify and help resolve environmental challenges.
- **Participation** in activities that lead to the resolution of environmental challenges.

Environmental education does not advocate a particular viewpoint or course of action. Rather, environmental education teaches individuals how to weigh various sides of an issue through critical thinking and enhances their own problem-solving and decision-making skills.

The [National Environmental Education Act of 1990](#) requires the EPA to provide national leadership to increase environmental literacy. The EPA established the Office of Environmental Education to implement this program. Find out more at <https://www.epa.gov/education/what-environmental-education>

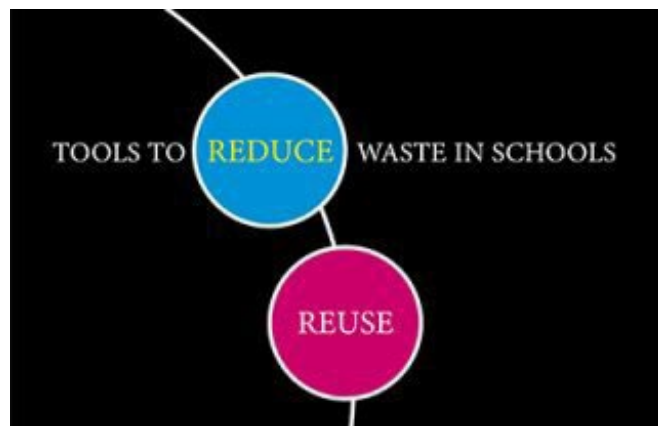
Grant Funding to Address Indoor Air Pollution at Schools – Notice of Funding Opportunity Open Period

The [Grant Funding to Address Indoor Air Pollution at Schools](#) is a new Inflation Reduction Act funding opportunity to “monitor and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants at schools in low-income and disadvantaged communities.” Grantees will assist K-12 schools in low-income, disadvantaged, and/or Tribal communities in the development and implementation of comprehensive indoor air quality management plans consistent with the EPA’s recommended best practices in our [Framework for Effective School IAQ Management](#)

The total estimated funding for this competitive opportunity is \$32,000,000. The EPA anticipates awarding four to six grants of \$5,000,000 to \$8,000,000 to support five years of IAQ activities. This communications plan focuses on announcing the 70-day Notice of Funding Opportunity application period and technical assistance available for interested applicants. The NOFO (funding opportunity number EPA-R-OAR-APS 24-02) opened on January 11 and will close on March 19, 2024.

Tools to Reduce Waste in Schools

By learning how to properly handle waste in schools, school officials can have a significant impact on the environment. To make waste reduction efforts and environmental protection feasible and practical for schools and school districts, the EPA developed [Tools to Reduce Waste in Schools \(pdf\)](#) (721 KB), an easy-to-use guide to help schools and school districts implement new, or expand upon existing, waste reduction programs. (Educators)



Check Out the Fifth National Climate Assessment Release

The Global Change Research Act of 1990 mandates that the U.S. Global Change Research Program deliver a report to Congress and the President not less frequently than every four years that “integrates, evaluates, and interprets the findings of the Program and discusses the scientific uncertainties associated with such findings; analyzes the effects of global change on the natural environment, agriculture, energy production and use, land and water resources, transportation, human health and welfare, human social systems, and biological diversity; and analyzes current trends in global change, both human-induced and natural, and projects major trends for the subsequent 25 to 100 years.” Read the [Fifth National Climate Assessment](#)

Update on Lead Testing in Schools and Daycares

Our 3 T's - Training, Testing, and Taking Action - on Lead Water Infrastructure Improvement for the Nation Act Section 2107 Program has been funded by the EPA since 2019. Each state in region 6 has a state program that receives the EPA grant funding to test lead by sampling of fountains and faucets used for drinking water in schools or daycares. States in Region 6 have taken 9,140 water samples for lead in schools and 6,238 water samples for lead in daycares. In total, Region 6 states have received \$11,391,000 from the EPA to test lead in schools and have new allotments for FY23 and FY24 available to apply for to fund remediation of those locations where samples have resulted in high lead concentrations.

EPA 3T's Lead website explains how to test for lead in your school or daycare.

<https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/3ts-reducing-lead-drinking-water>



The state agencies which oversee drinking water in the Region 6 states are the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Louisiana Department of Health, the Arkansas Department of Education, the Oklahoma Department of Education, and the New Mexico Department of Health. These state program have received grant awards to test lead in schools and daycares since 2019.

Tribal Nations have contacts to test for lead in schools and daycares depending on their location in Region 6. The Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona is about to begin sampling for lead in schools and daycares for Tribes in Arizona, Utah, California, Nevada, and New Mexico. The United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc, tests for lead for Tribes located in the central and southeastern United States, which includes Tribes in Louisiana and Texas. Tribes located in Oklahoma may contact the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality to have their daycares' and schools' drinking water faucets and fountains tested for lead.

Lead Testing in Schools and Daycares WIIN 2107 Tribal EPA Information Webpage

<https://www.epa.gov/tribaldrinkingwater/wiin-act-section-2107-lead-testing-school-and-child-care-program-drinking-water>



Contributing to a healthier planet is a *walk in the park!*

Here are simple ways to make every day Earth Day

LOWER YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

- Bike or walk
- Carpool or take public transportation
- Choose an energy efficient vehicle
- Make fewer trips by grouping your errands
- Drive smart: go easy on the brakes and gas, use cruise control, and keep your car well-maintained

REDUCE, REUSE, AND RECYCLE

- Reuse or repurpose containers, clothing and cloth grocery bags
- Give clothes a second life by donating or buying used
- Know what items your local recycling program collects, and what items are recyclable

BE H₂O SMART

- Repair leaky faucets and replace old equipment like toilets and dishwashers when possible.
- Turn off the water to brush teeth and shave
- Run full loads of laundry and dishes
- Collect rainwater to use in your garden

FEED PEOPLE, NOT LANDFILLS

- Check your refrigerator, pantry, and freezer before shopping to avoid buying foods you don't need
- Plan your meals for the week before heading to the store
- Properly store fruits and vegetables so they last longer
- Befriend your freezer and leftovers

epa.gov/earthday





Region 6 Selectees Receive More Than \$138M for 376 Clean School Buses

On January 10, the EPA announced selectees for the first grant competition for EPA's Clean School Bus Program. To date, the Clean School Bus Program has awarded almost \$2 billion to fund approximately 5,000 school bus replacements at over 600 schools. The breadth of the rebate selectees and grant recipients demonstrates the enthusiasm school districts across the county, including those in rural areas, have for electric and lower-emission school buses. These awards will improve air quality for children and their families and advance environmental justice, while boosting the economy and creating good-paying jobs.

The Clean School Bus program provides \$5 billion over five years (2022 – 2026) through multiple grant and rebate funding opportunities. Is your school district interested in learning more? Sign up for the [list serve](#) to receive the latest information about upcoming funding opportunities. You can also check out the [Clean School Bus website](#) to find lots of useful information, including technical assistance, case studies, and webinars (like the 2023/11/14 webinar titled "Panel Discussion: Transportation Directors with Q&A" to hear directly from schools making the transition to clean school buses).

Congratulations to the Region 6 2023 selectees!

Benefits of Electric School Buses

- Zero tailpipe pollution -- students, drivers, and members of the community will be exposed to significantly less harmful diesel emissions like particulate matter and nitrous oxides
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions compared to diesel school buses
- Reduced maintenance costs
 - Less brake wear due to regenerative braking and no engine or exhaust system maintenance
 - Potential for reduced fuel costs compared to diesel depending on electricity costs
- Quiet, clean operation
- Potential for [fleets to partner with local utilities to feed power back into the grid when buses are not in use](#) and electricity demand is high
- Improved student attendance and academic achievement

Benefits of Alternative Fuel School Buses

- Reduced tailpipe pollution -- students, drivers, and members of the community will be exposed to less harmful diesel emissions like particulate matter and nitrous oxides
- Potential for reduced greenhouse gas emissions compared to diesel depending on the alternative fuel that is used
- Potential for reduced fuel costs compared to diesel depending on the alternative fuel that is used
- Improved student attendance and academic achievement



SAVE THE DATE

Tuesday, April 9, 2024

AIR JUST AIR

Twenty-second Annual National Healthy Schools Day

Washington, DC, December 15, 2023

Healthy Schools Network announces that the 22nd Annual National Healthy Schools Day will be held Tuesday, April 9, 2024. The theme is *AIR JUST AIR*, inside schools and childcare facilities. Breathing clean air in schools allows every child to do better and every teacher to stay healthy. After taking steps to improve Indoor Air/Environmental Quality, schools will be better prepared for climate disasters and or new infectious diseases, thus reducing the risks of more long-term school closures. Healthy Schools Network founding issue is Indoor Air. It coordinates National Healthy Schools Day and welcomes its returning and new partners to join us in promoting healthy indoor air the week of April 9th.

<https://healthyschools.org/National-Healthy-Schools-Day/>

EPA Region 6 - South Central

1201 Elm Street, Suite 500
Dallas, Texas 75270

EPA Region 6 Children's Health Team

Virginia Vietti, Children's
Environmental
Health Coordinator
vietti.virginia@epa.gov
214 665-7431

Cathy Gilmore, SEE for Healthy
Schools Newsletter
gilmore.cathy@epa.gov
214 665-6574

Protecting human
health and the
environment.



ODDS AND ENDS

UPCOMING NEWSLETTER

CONTACT

DISCLAIMER

Safer cleaning in schools
helps protect everyone



Staff Contacts

Sustainable Management of Food: Stephen Sturdivant, sturdivant.stephen@epa.gov, 214 665-6673

Sustainable Materials Management: Deanna Debose, debose.deanna@epa.gov, 214 665-6461

Safer Choice and Pollution Prevention: Melanie Lillard, lillard.melanie@epa.gov, 214 665-7588

Lead Based Paint: Mikeal Adams, adams.mikeal@epa.gov, 214 665-6711

Integrated Pest Management: Charles Hooper, hooper.charles@epa.gov, 214 665-7349

Pollution Prevention and Source Reduction Assistance Grant Programs: Stephanie Cheaney, Cheaney.stephanie@epa.gov, 214 665-8057

Radon, Asbestos, and Indoor Air Quality: George Brozowski, brozowski.george@epa.gov, 214 665-8541

Groundwater: Scott Ellinger, ellinger.scott@epa.gov, 214 665-8408

Drinking Water: Maggie Kinney, kinney.margaret@epa.gov, 214 665-8569

Trash Free Waters: Rachel Renz, renz.rachel@epa.gov, 214 665-3129

PCBs: Harry Shah, shah.harry@epa.gov, 214 665-6457

WaterSense: Adam Weece, weece.adam@epa.gov, 214 665-2264

Environmental Education: Alexandra Olson, Olson.alexandra@epa.gov, 214 665-8506

Sustainable Materials Management and Disposal of Batteries: Jessica Miller, miller.jessica@epa.gov, 214 665-6563

In our next issue, the June 2024 Region 6 Healthy Schools Newsletter will highlight Sunwise and Extreme Heat Week, Smart Irrigation Month, Cleaning Up the Nation's Land, and the Water Sense Challenge.

Healthy Schools is published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 6 - South Central in Dallas, Texas. Region 6 includes the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas as well as 66 Tribes. For general information about Healthy Schools, to provide feedback on this newsletter or suggestions for future topics, or to be added or removed from the distribution list, please contact Cathy Gilmore, Senior Environmental Employee for Healthy Schools at Gilmore.cathy@epa.gov

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