

**Remarks
As Prepared
For
Reg Weaver, President
National Education Association
To
The Environmental Protection Agency's
4th Annual Indoor Air Quality
Tools for Schools National Symposium
Washington, D.C., October 28, 2003**

Good morning!

On behalf of the 2.7 million teachers and education support professionals of the NEA, I want to thank the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for their continued commitment to improving the indoor environment of schools across the country.

Thank you for creating the Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program. And thank you, for providing Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Kits, free of charge, to thousands of NEA members. We are proud to be a co-sponsor.

The NEA, through the NEA Health Information Network, would not be able to tackle the issue of indoor air quality without your continued support and funding. We could not do this important work alone.

I also want to thank and welcome our other colleagues in education—the school board officials, the school superintendents, principals, facility managers, parents, schools nurses, school business officials, school health officials, and others that are with us today.

I appreciate what each of you are doing to provide a safe and healthy environment where students can learn and staff can do their jobs.

For us, Indoor Air Quality is a quality of education issue.

We know that poor Indoor Air Quality is linked to student and staff performance. Exposure to indoor contaminants leads to increased absenteeism and decreased achievement at school.

We also know that asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism, especially among students from low-income families, and we know that poor indoor air quality increases the complications associated with this disease.

To highlight the importance of the indoor air quality issue to our members, let me share with you two actions taken at NEA's National Convention earlier this year:

- Our members launched a Healthy Schools Caucus, which more than 100 teachers and education support professionals joined to address school indoor air quality issues.
- And the Convention unanimously passed a New Business Item enabling an additional 25 NEA members to attend this conference.

Poor indoor air quality remains one of the top health concerns that NEA members face! What's more, as teachers and education support professionals, we also concerned about our student, because we know full well that our working conditions are the students' learning conditions.

Before this Symposium began, 90 NEA members and UniServ field staff in the audience today met to discuss models that have successfully brought administrators, school staff, and other friends of education together to solve indoor air quality problems.

Working together, we need the find real—not theoretical—answers to our schools' indoor air quality problems.

Teachers and education support professionals are looking to us for answers. Let me give you one example. An NEA member from Colorado named Bob Hanson recently contacted NEA asking that we find answers to the “real” problems in his school.

After 33 years of doing what he loves the most—teaching—Bob Hanson is tired of being sick as a result of the poor indoor air quality in his school. He works in a relatively poor school district, and his 1950's building has major indoor air quality problems.

Bob's sinus infections and upper respiratory infections start up in September and go away in June. Within one week of school ending, his sinuses clear, and stay clear until a week after school starts. He has had sinus surgery and has lived on various medications for the last five years. He shows the classics symptoms of poor indoor air quality.

Why does Bob Hanson stay? Why does he keep teaching? Let me tell you why in his own words: “Because I love my kids and my community! I keep going back because I care about them and they care about me. I don't know what life would be like without the munchkins I love hanging on my legs as I walk around the playground!”

But as Bob Hanson himself points out: “Ultimately, the profession will lose some of its most dedicated employees because they just can't stand it any more.”

Friends, we can't afford to lose Bob Hanson and others like him.

You are here to help Bob as well as all of the other teachers and education support professionals who work day-in and day-out in poor indoor air quality. You are here to help the students who are not learning all they need to learn because of the ill-effects of poor indoor air quality on their health.

Let me share one more story about an NEA member. His name is Chip Halverson. Chip hails from the state of Washington, and he is here today.

Chip Halverson is successfully using the Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program.

And here's what he has to say about it:

“With the support of the NEA and the guidance of the Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Kit, I have been able to confidently request that all chemicals be removed from my classroom. What's more, I was able to provide the necessary information and resources that got my previous school district to remove the mold from my classroom. And my health has been improving ever since!”

We need EPA's Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program because it works!

Please, have a productive symposium, and thank you for caring!