





Establishing Statewide Healthy Housing Efforts in Rhode Island

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Today's Presentation



1. History and Context of HH in RI
2. Coordinating Efforts
3. Involving the Community





History and Context of Healthy Housing Efforts in RI

Peter Simon, MD, MPH

Timeline



- ~1981 Reagan signs MCH Block Grant (Title V)
 - RI Lead Program moves from Division of Epidemiology to Division of Family Health
 - 3 Division leads representing the program
- 1984-1992 Lead Program integration with other children's investments: MCH, home visiting, Immunizations, WIC, Injury Control, others

Timeline



- 1990-1991: RI again receives categorical funding from CDC for a Lead Program suspended in 1980
- 1994: Agreed to get Medicaid match for administrative and environmental inspections

Timeline



- 1997: KIDSNET, RI's integrated child health information system begins enrolling all births. Data from 9 public health programs is integrated into KIDSNET.
- 2003: Department of Health's strategic plan adopted an objective on Healthy Places

Timeline



- 2004: Lead Program prepares the state's Elimination Plan and strengthens partnership with the state's Housing Resources Commission
- 2005: Lead Hazard Mitigation Law is implemented and expands authority to mitigate rental property

Timeline



- 2006: The Asthma Control Program and its coalition members formulate the *Healthy Residents, Healthy Homes* project to address asthma in Newport
- 2007: White paper on healthy housing is jointly released by the Department of Health and the Housing Resources Commission

Timeline



- 2007: HH Collaborative strengthens its composition including asthma, housing and other environmental partners
- 2008: A hospital-based clinic receives funding to pilot an “asthma center” using the Lead Center model and HH principles

A Word of Wisdom



For public health to have a credible role in improving housing safety and health, we need better data, resources to share, skills in creating and supporting cross-sectoral collaboration, humility to recognize our limitations of our knowledge and perspectives so that strong relationships with new partners will happen.



The RI Healthy Housing Collaborative

Magaly Angeloni, MBA

At the beginning



- **2004:**
 - CDC's plan to eliminate lead poisoning by 2010
- **2005:**
 - Get a small group to think about healthy housing
 - Assessment
 - Challenges
 - Several plans: HUD 5 year plan, Elimination Plan, Homelessness Plan, Land Use 2010, Healthy Rhode Islanders 2010, Statewide Planning for each city/town
 - Resources??

How it really began



- **2006:**
 - Many ideas, no one to execute them...
 - MOU between Health and Housing
 - Named the group the “Healthy Housing Collaborative”
 - Establishes a work plan and short term deliverables
 - Developed a unified vision

Strong forces



- **2007:**
 - “Healthy Housing: Why Rhode Island should invest in the vision” www.health.ri.gov/lead

“All Rhode Islanders have a right to housing that supports their growth, development, and physical and mental health, and provides the opportunity to achieve a positive quality of life throughout the entire lifespan”

Also in 2007



- Significant reorganization at the RI DOH
- Healthy Housing Steering Committee formed (June 2007)
- Merger puts four Steering Committee members under same leadership

It is happening!



- **2007 (con't):**
 - The Collaborative merges with:
 - Asthma work groups
 - Lead Program Advisory Committee
 - Internal DOH group
 - Any others interested
- **2008:**
 - Report of 2007 activities
 - Continue work with subcommittees

Success Story # 1



HH training to all RI nursing schools

- Began by one local college requesting 30 minute update about the Lead Program
- Expanded to other programs in the Department of Health
- The Lead Program proposed to expand it to Environmental Health
- Then expanded into Healthy Housing
- Now offered to all large nursing programs in the state

Success Story # 2



Made a home healthy

- Weatherization, Lead Hazard Reduction Program (HUD) and Community Development Block Grant funds, City government
- 1935, 3-bedroom, single family dwelling, owned by a single, pregnant woman with two children, identified via WIC
- Numerous, life-threatening hazards and energy problems in the home

Success Story # 3



HH Education to Judges:

- Proposed by a community lawyer working on environmental justice issues
- Supported by Steering Committee
- Consulted with other parties
- Accepted by District Court judges!
- Offered to other attorneys

Success Story # 4



Annual Healthy Housing Conference

- Transformed from the annual Lead Poisoning Prevention Conference
- Set precedent.... will take place every year
- Issue publication: HH Databook
- Ask director to state the vision for HH
- Get more partners involved
- Present awards in partnership with other agencies
- Follow up!!

Achievements



- HH vision, documented
- HH databook
- HH stakeholders presentation
- HH training
- Joint event with SmartGrowRI
- HH conference
- Committed HH Collaborative members

Work in Progress



- Housing issues affecting refugees
- Reach minimum housing officials
- Outreach for bed bugs, CO, etc.
- Work with schools on HH projects
- Regulating home inspections
- Statewide housing database
- Energy issues
- HH inspections
- Developing HH indicators

Lessons Learned



1. Use the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program experience as a model
2. HH is overwhelmingly big.... Develop one effort at a time
3. Get the right partners at the beginning
4. Show the progress

What Do We Need?



- Additional research, policies, support
- Federal agencies working closer
- Funding with fewer restrictions and requiring strong collaborations
- National forums
- Training and support
- Continue dialogue



Healthy Housing as an Environmental Justice issue

Steven Fishbach, JD, Community Lawyer
Rhode Island Legal Services

Healthy Housing is an Environmental Justice Issue in RI

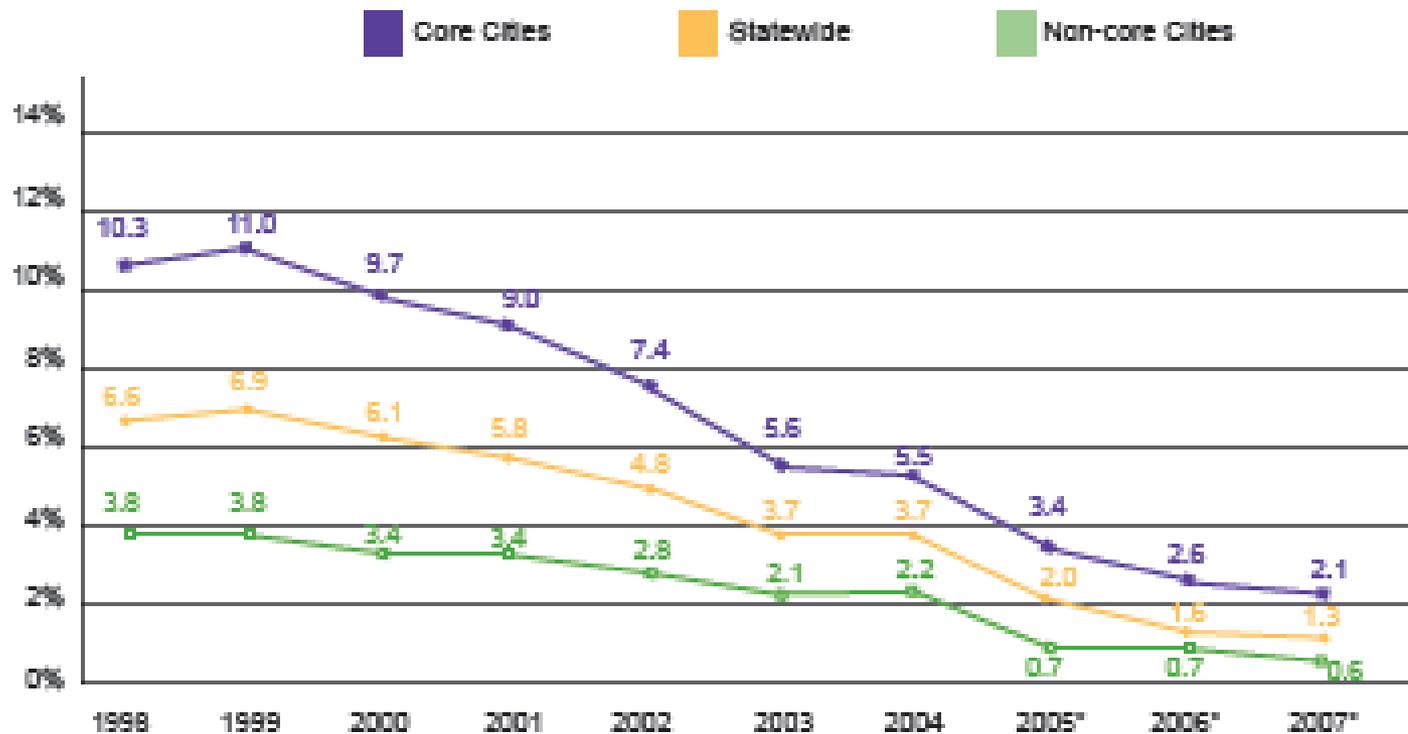


- Environmental Justice refers to environmental and public health problems that disproportionately affect poor people and people of color
- Illnesses related to substandard housing conditions more prevalent in communities of color and low income communities

Lead Poisoning Rates Higher in Rhode Island's Urban Core



Figure 3: Incidence of Lead Poisoning by Geographic Location 1998 - 2007

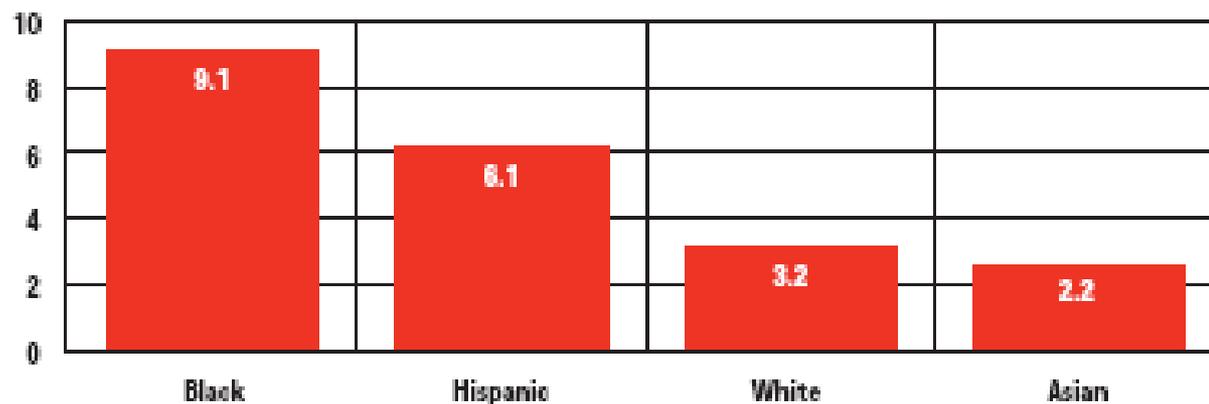


*Data are based on venous tests and confirmed capillary tests only.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Asthma Hospitalization Rates



Asthma Hospitalizations by Race/Ethnicity,
per 1,000 Children Under Age 18, Rhode Island, 2002-2006



◆ In Rhode Island between 2002 and 2006, the rate of asthma hospitalizations for Black children was almost three times the rate of hospitalizations for White children. Hispanic children were hospitalized at nearly twice the rate of White children.

Sources: Rhode Island Department of Health, Hospital Discharge Database, 2002-2006; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000.

Where Did We Start?



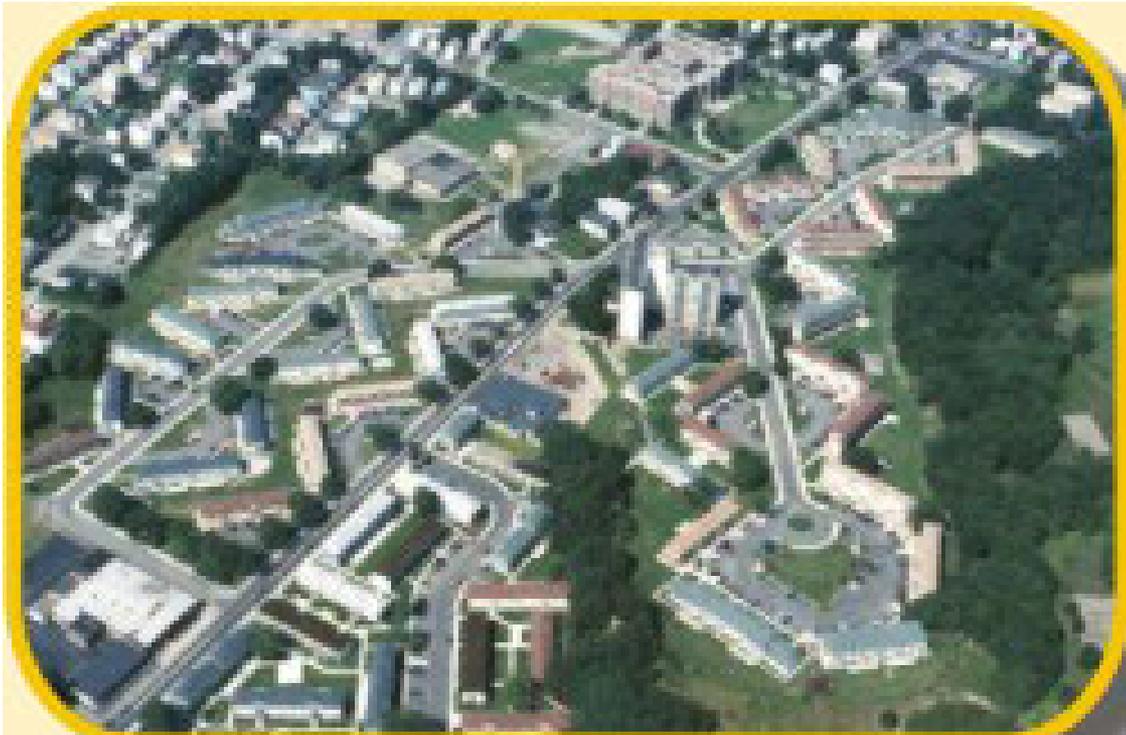
- School built on top of former garbage dump near City's largest public housing project



Hartford Park Tenants Association vs. Dept of Environmental Management



Tenants learn about relationship between toxic exposures and environmental illnesses



Tenants Take Action



- Funds obtained from EPA for asthma education and outreach project
- Residents surveyed
- Information disseminated through flyers and live presentations
- Asthma support group formed

Lawyers Take Action



- Obtain funds from EPA for education and outreach project on environmental justice
- Meet with groups and affected residents
- Conduct Educational Forums
- Develop educational materials based on community's concerns

Flyer for Tenants



WHAT TO DO IF YOUR LANDLORD WON'T MAKE REPAIRS

Document problems in your apartment by taking photos and asking your doctor to write a letter requesting that your landlord make repairs. Send the photos and doctors letter to your landlord along with a request from you to make repairs (keep copies of everything you send your landlord). As long as you pay your rent your landlord cannot evict you for making complaints about problems in your apartment.

If your landlord ignores your letter and does not fix the problem, you may:

- ◆ Call Housing Code enforcement (located at your city or town hall) who may order your landlord to make repairs.
- ◆ Fix the problem yourself and subtract the cost from your rent, but **ONLY** after you inform your landlord in writing that you will do this. You can only deduct \$125 a month unless you are paying to repair an essential service such as plumbing or heat. You cannot deduct the cost of any repairs to problems caused by the tenant or tenant's guests.
- ◆ Notify your landlord in writing that you will move out if the problem is not fixed in 20 days (only if you want to move).
- ◆ Ask a district court judge in writing to allow you to pay your rent to the court and to order your landlord to make repairs.
- ◆ Stop paying rent and if your landlord tries to evict you, tell the judge that your landlord didn't make repairs.

If you decide not to pay your rent, you must save your rent and cannot use that money for other expenses. Otherwise, you can be evicted. **You should always seek legal advice from a lawyer before deciding to withhold rent.**

If you have further questions contact Rhode Island Legal Services:



Providence:

56 Pine Street, Fourth Floor
Providence, RI 02903
(401) 274-2652

Newport:

50 Washington Square
Newport, RI 02840
(401) 846-2264



IS YOUR APARTMENT MAKING YOU SICK?

Poorly maintained housing is the nation's # 1 environmental threat to young children, who spend more than 90% of their time indoors. Children and even adults can become sick from coming into contact with poisons or allergens if your apartment is not regularly cleaned and maintained. Dust, cockroaches, mold, and mildew can trigger asthma attacks; lead paint, asbestos, pesticide fumes and carbon monoxide are poisons that can make people sick.

Tenants and landlords can do things to make apartments healthier places to live. Your landlord is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the building—but as a tenant you are responsible to do whatever you can to keep your apartment clean and safe.

Inside this brochure is a chart that lists common health hazards in apartments. For each hazard there is information on what causes the hazard, what you and your landlord can do to lessen the hazard, and where to go for more information. The back of this brochure lists things tenants can do to get their landlords to make apartments safer. Note there are additional laws about lead paint that are not discussed here.

Children who live in homes that are well ventilated, dry, and free of pests, poisons, and dangerous gases will be healthier and lead fuller lives. Learn how you and your landlord can make your apartment a safer place to live.

COMMON HEALTH HAZARDS IN RENTAL HOUSING

Hazard	Source of Hazard	Possible Health Effects	Corrective Action Needed	Where to Complain & Get Information
Asbestos	Once used for boiler/pipe insulation, in tile and siding materials, fireproofing material	Cancer of the lung and lining of the lung (mesothelioma), Irreversible lung scarring (asbestosis)	Maintenance or removal by a licensed company	Landlord; asbestos program at the RI Department of Health www.health.ri.gov (not regulated unless 3-family house or greater)
Carbon Monoxide	Odorless gas from burned fuel in furnaces, stoves, unvented heaters and other appliances	Dizziness, headaches, nausea, confusion, disorientation, coma, death	Keep carbon monoxide monitors in working order; properly vent furnaces and appliances; regularly maintain furnace	Landlord; code enforcement; Fire Companies can check carbon monoxide levels
Cockroaches	Moisture, improper storage of food, holes in structure that is low to the ground	Trigger asthma attacks	Properly seal foods; plenty of ventilation; clean food surfaces; seal holes or cracks; place trash in sealed containers; use cockroach bait	Landlord; code enforcement; ask doctor about asthma attacks
Dust Mites	Beds, pillows, furniture, carpets, and on stuffed toys; moisture from poor ventilation	Trigger asthma attacks; helps develop asthma; causes hay fever	Eliminate moisture sources; regularly clean bedding with hot water; wash stuffed toys; vacuum and steam rugs; pull up old rugs, use mattress covers	Ask doctor about asthma; talk to landlord, but may not be a minimum housing code violation
Lead Paint	Peeling lead-based paint in housing, especially if built before 1950; lead dust often caused by opening and closing windows covered in lead paint; lead in soil; lead contamination of water	High lead levels: coma, convulsions, and death; Moderate to high: effects nervous system, hematopoietic system and kidneys; Low levels: learning disabilities, reduced concentration and attentiveness, and behavior problem; decreased hearing acuity; hyperactivity	Lead dust control; chelation therapy (reduce hyperactivity); use filtered water or boil water before use; properly cover/dispose of peeled paint; replace windows covered in lead paint; cover lead-contaminated soil with clean soil	Ask doctor about lead poisoning; find out if the house is safe for lead; have children under 6 years of age tested annually; visit RI Department of Health website www.health.ri.gov/lead Comply with the Lead Hazard Mitigation Law. Visit www.hrc.ri.gov for information about rights and responsibilities for property owners and tenants.
Mold	Areas of poor ventilation; moisture from showers; water-saturated cellulose products (e.g. insulation and ceiling tile)	Trigger asthma attacks, allergies, skin rashes, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, flu symptoms, fungal infections, respiratory and eye irritation, fever, digestive problems, coughing	Eliminate moisture sources; clean and dry out flooded areas as soon as possible; call professional mold remediation company	Landlord; code enforcement; contact the RI Department of Health for information on mold types and removal: www.health.ri.gov
Pesticides	Chemicals applied in apartment and/or on lawns; children may track pesticides indoors if they walk through areas treated with pesticides	Dizziness, headaches, vomiting, sweating, fatigue, respiratory and eye irritation; increased risk of cancer and birth defects; learning, developmental, and behavioral problems; trigger asthma attacks.	Use less toxic pesticides; eliminate food and water sources consumed by pests; use trapping (e.g. mouse traps); regularly clean apartment; place trash in sealed containers	Landlord code enforcement (about pests); Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) www.epa.gov for information in Integrated pest management
Radon	Odorless radioactive gas that moves through soil into buildings through cracks in foundation and pipes	Increases risk of lung cancer	Test for radon gas, may require special radon removal system to be installed.	Landlord; contact RI Department of Health www.health.ri.gov or US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at www.epa.gov for information on removal of health hazards
Rodents	Gaps or holes in building and apartment; mice can get through a hole as small as a nickel and rats as small as a half dollar	Trigger asthma attacks; increase asthma symptoms; produce allergic reactions and diseases such as hantavirus and lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus	Integrated pest management: seal off holes and areas where rodents enter building; set traps; place trash in sealed containers; minimize access to food and shelter; use less-toxic pesticides	Landlord; municipal public works department; visit RI Department of Health www.health.ri.gov

For more information on the RI Department of Health's programs listed here, visit the website www.health.ri.gov, or call the Health Information Line at 1-800-942-7434.

Final Task: Plan A Conference



- Create working group to plan conference
- Conference goal is to create new environmental justice group
- Work group includes residents, environmental organizations, health department

Conference A Success



SAVE THE DATE:

Saturday, November 3, 2007

From 9AM to 3PM

**FREE & OPEN
TO THE PUBLIC**
(REGISTRATION REQUIRED -
FORM ON BACK SIDE OF FLYER)

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT
ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS FACING LOW

One Month Later: Conference Attendees Reassemble



- Unanimous decision to form new organization



**ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
LEAGUE
OF
RHODE ISLAND**

The League Takes Off



- Mission Statement adopted
- Incorporation
- Committees Established
- Funds raised—CARE Grant

Next Steps



- Hire staff
- Obtain Tax exempt status
- Develop CARE project
- Expand membership



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