

# NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:  
Wednesday, October 29, 2008

Contact:  
Charity Carbine, VPIRG, 223-8241 x4108

## **Vermont's law to protect children's health in schools gets an "F" on report card**

### **Children remain vulnerable to health hazards at schools**

**Montpelier, VT** – As students settle back into school, a law designed to protect their health in the classroom received a failing grade in the first report card of Act 125. Act 125 was charged with reducing environmental health hazards in schools through the creation of a voluntary program called *Envision: Promoting Healthy School Environments*. According to the report card released by the Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG), Act 125 has failed to protect the majority of Vermont's children and school personnel from polluted indoor air.

"We're two days shy of Halloween and what's really frightening is that so little has been done to protect more than 100,000 children and staff members from exposure to mold, harmful chemicals, and other contributors to polluted indoor air in schools," said Charity Carbine, environmental health advocate for VPIRG.

Under Act 125, the State was required to create a model school environmental health plan and award environmental health certificates to schools that voluntarily excelled in improving indoor air quality. Passed by the Legislature in 2000, Act 125 established a goal of having at least 50% of schools qualify for an environmental health certificate by January 2005. Only 7% of schools had received a certificate by the end of 2006.

"This is abysmal. At this pace, it will take at least another 30 years before reach the modest goal of protecting just half of our schools from these health hazards," said Carbine.

"As a parent and nurse, I'm shocked that more hasn't been done to protect the health of our children in schools," said Susan Paris, board member of Mama Says – a statewide parent network working to improve the lives of families in Vermont. "Just because we can't see polluted air in classrooms like we can see black smoke billowing from a factory, doesn't mean that our children aren't greatly impacted."

"Our kids are already under assault from toxic exposures. Let's not increase their exposure, especially in schools, which should be a safe, trusted place," said Jessica Edgerly, a community organizer with Toxics Action Center.

According to VPIRG, the failing score is a result of the voluntary nature of Act 125 and the State's unwillingness to make environmental health in schools a priority.

VPIRG recommends that Vermont turn to new opportunities and solutions for creating healthy learning environments including: 1) implementing a comprehensive healthy schools program; 2) requiring schools to purchase environmentally preferable cleaning products; and 3) eliminating high-risk pesticides and establishing strong integrated pest management programs at schools.

###