

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

As Prepared for Kevin Teichman, Deputy Assistant Administrator for  
Science, Office of Research and Development

Congressional Briefing with Rep. Doris Matsui (D-CA) and Rep.  
Christopher Smith (R-NJ)

### Opening Remarks

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- I am very pleased to be here today. I would like to first thank everyone for taking time out of your busy schedules to attend this briefing. I also would like to thank the Congressional Children's Workgroup for initiating this briefing and my own staff for coordinating it.
- Today I am here to briefly talk about one of EPA's top priorities--- children's health. Specifically, children's environmental health research.
- I am delighted to share with you some of the progress we have made as an agency and as a country in identifying the potential risks posed to children's health, and most importantly, what we can do, *together*, to create a healthier environment in which children can live, grow and play.
- And when I say together, I mean with our sister Federal agencies (as represented today by Sam Wilson of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), the academic community (as represented by Virginia Rauh of Columbia University), and others.
- We all have the shared goal of protecting children's health---which is why we are here today and which is why this needs to be one of many such briefings in the future.
- 10 years ago, we as a country knew relatively very little about children's environmental health issues.
- We didn't know the potential risks of low-dose, chronic exposures of many pollutants; particular windows of vulnerability that open and close as children grow and develop; and the ranges of chemical exposures children face within given life stages.
- It was in 1997 that we really began taking action as an agency.
- Empowered by a 1997 federal executive order, EPA, along with our partners in the Department of Health and Human Services, especially NIEHS, began coordinating research on children's health and established the Office of Children's Health Protection.

- At the same time, EPA's National Center for Environmental Research ("NCER"), which falls within the Office of Research and Development, began to sponsor studies looking at children's exposure through various stages of development.
- The Center also initiated studies of the health effects in children associated with these exposures and potential interventions. This research continues to be funded through EPA's Science to Achieve Results, or "STAR" Program.
- Today, as a result of these efforts, we can proudly say that we now have a better understanding of children's health, in particular, children's environmental health.
- Thanks in large part to research summarized in the report, "A Decade of Children's Environmental Health Research: Highlights from EPA's Science to Achieve Results Program."
- This report is an invaluable resource for identifying children's unique vulnerabilities and exposures, particularly in the home.
- Having this knowledge at our fingertips is a tremendous first step in protecting children from before birth to first grade and beyond---and getting us closer to our universal goal: creating a healthier environment in which children can live, grow and play.
- We have made remarkable progress as an agency and as a country in learning about the potential risks posed to children's health, but there is more we can and will do.
- For example, chronic illnesses like childhood asthma, autism and obesity are a major concern, are steadily increasing, and are appearing earlier in life.
- We do not have the answers to what is contributing to these trends, but we are aligning our research efforts to rapidly address these costly public health issues.
- Last year, for example, EPA initiated a new research center to focus on the complex environmental, genetic and social factors that contribute to disparities in healthy pregnancies and healthy newborns.
- We are also continuing to support research on the gene-environmental interactions that may be involved in several development disabilities, including autism.
- Protecting children is EPA's goal. Promoting safe environments is our responsibility.
- In closing, thank you again for being here today to discuss the importance we all have in learning more about children's health and doing more to better protect this vulnerable population.

- I would now like to turn to Nigel Fields to describe, in more detail, our report, “A Decade of Children’s Environmental Health Research: Highlights from EPA’s Science to Achieve Results Program.”