

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's Chemical Roundup Program Success Story 3.10.09

Background

In 2003, the University of Idaho conducted a Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) to resolve an environmental enforcement action. The University chose to coordinate with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) and focus on chemical cleanouts at Moscow area schools. The University employed a graduate student to contact schools, provide on-site inventory assistance, and coordinate lab pack services and disposal. The project cleaned out chemicals at nine area schools, removing 781 pounds of chemicals. Their work revealed that Idaho's schools had accumulated a significant amount of hazardous chemicals that posed a risk to students and faculty including crystallized ether, mercury, and various carcinogens. As a result of the University's efforts, IDEQ decided to continue the initiative by partnering with local waste handlers, universities, community leaders, and school officials to develop strategies for removing excess chemicals from Idaho schools. The Idaho Chemical Roundup Program grew out of this effort by the University of Idaho and IDEQ to address chemicals in schools.

Getting Started

The success of the University of Idaho project prompted IDEQ to search for additional funding to support and expand the Idaho Chemical Roundup Program. This work began in 2004 when IDEQ applied for and received a \$25,000 EPA grant. Under this project, IDEQ developed information and tools for schools, including information on how to conduct a chemical inventory, safe storage practices, and region specific waste disposal options. These resources are now available on IDEQ's Web site for schools to access. IDEQ also offered on-site and remote technical assistance to schools and mini-grants to schools statewide in the amount of \$1,000 to offset the costs of chemical disposal. IDEQ worked with 23 schools statewide, removing over 1,400 pounds of chemicals from 22 schools. Using a "mini-grant" approach to jump start chemical management activities provided schools with enough incentive to cover the remaining costs. The average cost of the cleanouts for the 22 schools was \$3,500 per school.

After the EPA grant concluded in 2004, IDEQ continued to search for additional funding opportunities and offer technical assistance to schools. The agency attended teacher conferences and workshops across the state to promote the program and generate interest. Their efforts are paying off. In 2008, the Idaho Chemical Roundup Program received a \$50,000 EPA grant to assist additional schools in conducting chemical cleanouts. IDEQ worked with 21 schools, removing over 4,000 lbs of chemicals. For 2009, the Idaho Chemical Roundup

Program secured \$10,000 from IDEQ to assist 10 schools with their chemical cleanout efforts.

How the Chemical Roundup Program Works

To enroll in the Idaho Chemical Roundup Program, a school must first obtain and complete an application for one of the IDEQ mini-grants. The school must indicate how much funding they are requesting, how much funding the school itself can provide, and their timeline for chemical removal. Schools must also complete and submit an inventory of all science lab chemicals; provide a proposed list of chemicals to be removed; and summarize actions (e.g. developing a chemical hygiene plan, appointing a purchasing officer) to be taken to prevent future chemical accumulations. The final action is an extremely important step since preventing the future accumulation of chemicals is the overall goal of the program.

Once funding is received, a school must agree to use a waste management company with a valid EPA identification number to pack, transport, and dispose of or recycle waste chemicals. The school receives a packet from IDEQ that contains tools (e.g. fact sheets) to aid their chemical management activities and a success story form which allows schools to share their best practices and challenges. Success stories are posted on the Idaho Chemical Roundup Web site.

Upon completion of the chemical cleanout, the school submits the resulting invoice to the IDEQ to receive reimbursement, rather than IDEQ reimbursing the hazardous waste contractor. Taking responsibility for chemical management and cleanout costs that exceed the \$1,000 mini-grant gives the school a financial investment in the efforts, as well as an incentive to consider future chemical purchasing decisions (e.g., not buying in bulk or purchasing highly toxic chemicals). The school must also submit a final report to the IDEQ that contains a complete inventory of all chemicals that were removed and a final cost for the project. Schools who successfully complete their chemical cleanout projects receive a certificate from IDEQ that acknowledges their effort.

Although the program has seen its share of success, there are some barriers to overcome. Perhaps the greatest barrier has been the reluctance of schools to investigate their chemical management situation or admit to a problem for fear of the cost that could be incurred. To address this issue, the Idaho Chemical Roundup Program stresses the need for schools to take a step-by-step approach to chemical management and do what they can afford to with the \$1,000 mini-grant.

Since its inception in 2004, the Idaho Chemical Roundup Program has helped 52 schools recycle or properly dispose of 6,463 pounds of chemicals.

“(IDEQ) tries to provide the information and resources schools need to make their labs safer and to make good decisions for the future...we try to provide the incentive to get involved and make it happen.”

--Joanna Pierce, Pollution Prevention Program, Idaho
Department of Environmental Quality

Critical Success Factors

Joanna Pierce, who works on the Idaho Chemical Roundup Program, cites the collaboration of stakeholders as one of the most integral components of the program. At its inception, IDEQ worked to involve a variety of stakeholders in their efforts to increase awareness and develop an effective chemical cleanout strategy. Target audiences included:

- Teachers;
- Principals;
- School districts;
- Department of Education;
- Board of Education;
- Division of Building Safety;
- Local and state fire, police, and emergency responders; and
- Insurance companies.

In addition to seeking input from stakeholders, involving the school districts' Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) Managers has facilitated chemical management and cleanout activities by giving district teachers a single point of contact for chemical management concerns. However, for the many small districts in Idaho that do not have EHS Managers, it has been the motivated science teacher, principal, or janitorial staff member who has donated their time to get the job done and sustain their efforts. Most importantly, IDEQ has the support of its management for its Chemical Roundup Program. By showing a continuing need for chemical management assistance in schools, IDEQ has been able to receive additional funding and technical expertise for its activities.

Lastly, because of the often limited funding and resources of IDEQ's program and many schools in Idaho, the Idaho Chemical Roundup program is committed to helping schools sustain their efforts over time. IDEQ requires applicants to outline the actions they will take to prevent the future accumulation of chemicals and provides resources and assistance to help them meet their goals.

What Can I Do?: Lessons Learned from the Idaho Chemical Roundup Program

- Engage a variety of stakeholders when developing your school chemical management/cleanout program. That way, your program will have more knowledge and expertise to draw from to develop an effective strategy.
- Give schools an incentive to participate. This will generate positive interest in the program and increase the likelihood of schools committing to the program.
- Make program outreach accessible. Whether through a web site, conference/workshop attendance, or one-on-one interaction, the more informed a school is about its options, the more likely it will make the best choices.
- Encourage schools to take responsibility for chemical management costs, whether in full or as a percentage of the total cost. Schools are more likely to sustain their programs if they are financially invested in them.
- Emphasize prevention; it is the only way to sustain current efforts in the future.

For more information on the Idaho Chemical Roundup Program and EPA's efforts to promote responsible chemical management, visit the following Web sites:

[Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's Chemical Roundup Program](#)

[EPA Schools Chemical Cleanout Campaign \(SC3\)](#)