


# Resolve to Make Responsible Chemical Management a Priority this National Healthy Schools Day

 [greenschoolsnationalnetwork.org/resolve-make-responsible-chemical-management-priority-national-healthy-schools-day/](https://greenschoolsnationalnetwork.org/resolve-make-responsible-chemical-management-priority-national-healthy-schools-day/)

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Parents send their children to school each day with the expectation that they will not only receive a good education, but that they will be cared for by teachers and school staff. Having a healthy learning environment is important for academic success, not to mention optimal health and well-being. At Green Schools National Network, we firmly believe that all schools have the potential to be green, healthy, and sustainable. It forms the bedrock of our vision.

National Healthy Schools Day provides an opportunity for us all to reflect on what school communities can do to improve the health of their learning environments. One area that often gets overlooked is the science classroom's storage room. It is not uncommon to find outdated, unknown, improperly stored, and excessive amounts of chemicals hiding in plain view. Because of the hazardous nature of some of these chemicals, even a small amount

may pose a risk to students and school staff. Every year, accidental chemical spills result in lost school days and instructional time, and cost millions of dollars to clean up. Many of these spills are preventable.

There are a number of reasons why chemical management can be an issue in schools.

- There is often a lack of awareness among school administration and school staff on how to properly inventory, handle, store, and dispose of chemicals.
- There is not a point person, or someone in charge, of overseeing curriculum chemicals. This task is typically viewed as an 'add-on duty' to everything else teachers are held responsible for.
- Teachers often buy chemicals in bulk because it is generally cheaper, and they fear future budget constraints will prevent them from purchasing chemicals.
- Some schools have stockpiles of chemicals leftover from the 1950s and 1960s, the era of the technology race and Sputnik, and are often unaware or unsure of how to dispose of them.
- There is little communication across Academic, Administrative, and Facilities departments regarding inventory, handling, disposal, and purchasing.
- Chemical storage facilities are often not built to handle chemicals (e.g., poor ventilation).

Fortunately, it is never too late to start down the path to adopting responsible chemical management practices at your school. You can begin by conducting a comprehensive evaluation of your school's chemical management situation using the following checklist, adapted from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) *Building Successful Programs to Address Chemical Risks in Schools*.

### Evaluating your School's Chemical Management Situation, Policies, and Procedures

#### **Purchasing**

- Does my school have a purchasing policy to evaluate chemicals before they come into the school?
- Does one person or a department do chemical purchasing?
- Are chemicals purchased for expected use within the calendar or fiscal year?
- Does my school have a 'green' or 'microscale' chemistry curriculum?
- Have toxic chemicals been replaced with less toxic alternatives?

#### **Storage**

- Does the school have a policy or set of procedures for storing chemicals (e.g., a Chemical Hygiene Plan)?
- Is there a staff member assigned to manage every chemical storage area?
- Are stored chemicals kept locked?

- Are chemicals accessible only to qualified handlers?
- Do all chemicals have up-to-date Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) / Safety Data Sheets (SDS)?
- Are all MSDSs / SDSs kept together in a common location?
- Are all chemicals labeled, including name, purchase/expiration dates, and storage information?
- Are chemicals stored according to type and group (not alphabetically)?

## Inventory

- Is there a policy or set of procedures for identifying out-of-date chemicals?
- Is there a comprehensive list of chemicals stored on-site for all departments?
- Are incoming chemicals added to a comprehensive list?

## Use

- Does my school have a Chemical Hygiene Plan or some kind of plan for responding to chemical emergencies?
- Are students and staff adequately trained to handle the chemicals they interact with?
- Do areas where chemicals are used or handled have up-to-date safety guides and functioning safety equipment?

## Disposal

- Are all hazardous/toxic wastes disposed of according to federal/state guidelines (e.g., NOT 'down-the-drain')?
- Are used or outdated chemicals disposed of within a reasonable time-frame (e.g., not 'stockpiled' in storage rooms)?
- Does the school retain a waste removal specialist to handle hazardous/toxic chemicals after use and/or outdated chemicals?

Once you have completed this checklist, you may be wondering what steps to take next. You can find more information on creating a responsible chemical management program in *[Building Successful Programs to Address Chemical Risks in Schools](#)*. Looking for more resources on chemical risks and responsible chemical management in schools? Check out Healthy Schools Network's [Healthy Schools/Healthy Kids Clearinghouse](#) and [Toolkits on Green Cleaning and Healthy Products](#), as well as EPA's [managing chemicals in schools](#) website.