

## **A brief history of Health Canada's IAQ Tools for Schools Action Kit**

Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Action Kit for Canadian Schools, 2003 is a very useful kit for use by school staff, students or others to improve school Indoor Air Quality. Health Canada's version is on line at <http://publications.gc.ca/Collection/H46-2-03-292E.pdf> click on **Continue to Publication**

catalogue number: H46-2 / 03-292E-PDF

It can also be found by calling 1-833-223-1014 or emailing [hc.air.sc@canada.ca](mailto:hc.air.sc@canada.ca)

### **CASLE is listed on page 16-7 of the resources section**

The Kit is also posted on CASLE's website at:

<https://casle.ca/indoor-air-quality-tools-for-schools-action-kit/>

CASLE created user-friendly checklists to accompany the kit and used them in several schools.

Find these and other relevant materials at: <https://casle.ca/category/tools-for-schools/>

Documents in this archive include these: CASLE's Degaust, Robinson, and Moser served on the Project Teams of two national research studies funded by Health Canada. One, the "Indoor Air Quality in Canadian Schools" of November 2003, was conducted by the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, Dalhousie University. It was preceded by a smaller pilot study done prior to the full report, also conducted by the same team, including CASLE. It used the USEPA version of the Kit because the Canadian one was not yet ready.

(CASLE's logo can be found on the report cover page, and CASLE is listed on p.2, p.231, p.236)

The other study was conducted by the New Brunswick Lung Association, with CASLE as a team member.

**The Scent-Free Module of the Canadian Tools for Schools Kit** is also posted in this archive section.

It was created under Health Canada Contract #: H4045-1SB153

CASLE was a key contributor to the module and is listed in the resource section on p.18.

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### **History:**

In 1992, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, five concerned parents formed Canadians for A Safe Learning Environment (CASLE), a registered charity. It was not until 1996 that the United States Environmental Protection Agency developed its very effective Tools for Schools program, followed over a decade later by Health Canada's version. CASLE's work was pioneering. The US developed an effective webinar series on IAQ in schools, and CASLE's President, Robinson, was an invited reviewer of their web documents (1998-2000). CASLE was a reviewer of the draft Tools for Schools IAQ Action Kit for Canadian Schools and a key contributor to its Scent-Free Module.

CASLE's Robinson and Harland were keynote speakers together (both had significant health issues. CASLE's working board always worked in tandem in case one or the other had a setback.) at the NS Department of Education Facilities Planning Division's first provincial conference on Indoor Air Quality in schools. At that conference CASLE introduced the USEPA's Tools for Schools Kit to the Department. The Department went on to provide copies of the Kit to all school board operations departments in the province of NS.

A chemistry teacher, Sandra LeBlanc, of Glace Bay High School implemented the USEPA version of the Kit through her curriculum and thereby the school succeeded in overcoming its numerous IAQ

problems. LeBlanc was honoured with a USEPA Tools for Schools award, and her innovation sparked a curriculum-based, student focused, Tools for Schools program in US schools.

LeBlanc was then hired by the Dept of Education, and with CASLE's Robinson's assistance, to train in the Kit's use the entire school body and staff of a struggling school in the Tri-County School Board. LeBlanc and CASLE remained in touch over the years and LeBlanc was to be a trainer/coordinator in a major project to implement the Canadian Kit provincially.

However, meanwhile, CASLE's Karen Robinson, Avis Ratchford (Degaust) and Sandy Moser served on the Project Teams of two national research studies funded by Health Canada. One, "Indoor Air Quality in Canadian Schools", November 2003, was conducted by the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, preceded by a smaller pilot study done prior to the full report. The other was conducted by the New Brunswick Lung Association.

Both studied how to successfully implement the IAQ Kit nationally. However, the Kit was never implemented nationally or provincially in NS. CASLE assisted several NS schools and School boards in implementation and also assisted the NB Lung Association's Train the Trainer program for implementing the Kit in NB schools. Their Healthy Schools Program trained many NB schools in the use of the Kit.

In NS, CASLE assisted many schools to implement the Kit, such as Sir John A MacDonald High School, Citadel High (after the opening event that made people ill), Halifax West High School, Barrington High School, Shelburne High School, and others. By this time, most on CASLE's working board had stepped back to the managing board, or away completely. Personal tragedies had hit several of the previously loyal CASLE working board, and CASLE's President was working mostly alone at this point. She decided to work on a province-wide implementation by putting together a strong and enthusiastic partnership with the Depts of Education and Labour, with a retired Superintendent of Schools (Gunn), now-principal LeBlanc, Dept of Education staff Gerald Muise, school boards, and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre at Dalhousie U, among others.

Robinson and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre grant writer put together a major funding proposal to implement the Kit in all NS schools. Because of success that the New Brunswick Lung Association was having accessing Environment Department's Eco-Action funds for similar projects, and NB Lung wrote a strong letter of support, Eco-Action funds were sought. The application had a huge volunteer component and a mere \$40K was needed to succeed. However, the Eco-Action jury misinterpreted the application several times over and declined the funding. For example, a major concern was that CASLE did not have a history of managing grant funds of this size. How did the jury miss that the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre would be managing the funds?

It was a huge blow to morale. In fact, the dying blow for CASLE to ever apply again for grants. CASLE had applied many times over the years for grants only to be told by environment funders that their work fit better under health, and by health funders that their work fit better under environment! Consequently, CASLE's working board of directors had decided years ago that their precious energy needed to go to doing the work rather than to trying to find funding in what was apparently an impossible situation.

At this time, Robinson was tasked with assisting elderly family members. Trying to find other funders required volunteer time and effort she did not have, also the fact that she had a significant physical disability which limited her time and energy at the best of times. She no longer had a tandem worker

alongside her. To coordinate the program with the tremendous team she had built would have been possible, but not to start all over looking for funding.

Robinson returned to regular CASLE efforts assisting schools and new school construction projects as time allowed. She began implementing the Kit during the commissioning phase of newly constructed schools, and further broadening its usefulness. CASLE's work continued. Some time later, Christopher (Kit) Hood, husband of Agnes Malouf of CASLE's managing board and later to become a board member himself, arranged for the Degraasi *Playing With Time Foundation* to fund CASLE's expenses for about 10 years.

Then in 2007, Robinson attended an unrelated Health Canada conference in Ottawa and happened to sit beside a Health Canada acquaintance who commented how unfortunate it was that every province and territory turned down Health Canada's recent offer to work with them to implement the IAQ Kit! This was news to Robinson. On returning to Nova Scotia, she contacted the Department of Education only to find they would have welcomed Health Canada's offer. Further investigation uncovered that because there is no national education department in Canada, Health Canada only reached out to their own counterparts in the provinces – the Department of Health that was not familiar with The Kit and also would have had enough interest in it to open a route through the jurisdiction of the provincial Department of Education. They did not even know to approach the Department of Education. Every province and territory turned the opportunity down! This was another stunning loss for an IAQ Kit that has so much promise. Did they not use the two implementation research papers mentioned above?

Robinson, with enthusiastic backing from the NS Departments of Education and newly converted staff of the Health Department, then approached Health Canada to see if the program could be reoffered. However, the case was closed. The 2007 proposal is posted in this archive section.

In March 2021, Robinson learned that Health Canada had begun updating The Kit and was planning to create an App, or Apps, of the various topics in The Kit to make it available digitally. However, staff working on this were reassigned at least temporarily during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is thought the plans will resume at some point.