

Mothers for Clean Air Press Release

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Cheryl Kaplan of UT Medical Branch and Ann May, Jane Laping, and Carol Huelbig of Mothers for Clean Air present a set of air quality warning flags to West University Elementary



Cheryl Kaplan leads West University Elementary students in Ozone Defenses, a new interactive theatrical exercise.

Local Group Educates West University Elementary Students about Houston Smog with New Theatre Activity

One-hundred fifty third-graders at West University Elementary learned how to avoid harmful levels of Houston smog through a new interactive theatrical exercise at an Earth Day observance on May 13. Mothers for Clean Air, a local organization concerned about air quality and its effects on health, led the activity and gave the school a set of five colored flags to alert students when outside air is unhealthy.

Through collaboration with the Theatre Outreach and Education program at the University of Texas Medical Branch NIEHS Center/Sealy Center for Environmental Health and Medicine (UTMB), Mothers for Clean Air developed Ozone Defenses to teach third through fifth grade students about air quality. Ozone Defenses introduces the students to ground level ozone, where it comes from, how it affects health, and appropriate outdoor activities at different ozone concentrations.

Ozone Defenses uses the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index (AQI), a color-coded health chart, to teach students simple steps to take to protect their health during high ozone days. West University students acted out safe activities for each of the five ozone levels on the AQI chart, empowering them to make health-protecting decisions during high concentrations of ground level ozone.

Cheryl L. Kaplan of UTMB and creator of the project said, "Theatre is a wonderful vehicle for education by engaging the body, the voice and the mind. This interactive

forum allows our youth to learn through a creative means that helps them to better understand and retain this important health message."

Jane Laping, Executive Director of Mothers for Clean Air, was the technical consultant for the project. Laping said, "Teaching children to take responsibility for their own health at a young age will have life-long benefits. We don't often think about the quality of the air we breathe, but in the Houston-Galveston area it is a fact of life."

Mothers for Clean Air and UTMB also developed another drama activity for Kindergarten through 2nd graders that teaches children where air pollution comes from. Both activities are interactive games that use elements of familiar games such as "Simon Says" and "Musical Chairs." Mothers for Clean Air has trained volunteers who will lead the 45 minute activities in classrooms or camp settings for 20-25 children at a time.

Mothers for Clean Air is a local, non-profit organization concerned about air pollution in the Houston-Galveston area and its effects on health, particularly to children. MfCA educates the eight-county ozone non-attainment area, which includes Harris County and the seven counties that touch it, about air quality and what individuals can do as a community to prevent air pollution and reduce exposure.

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