

Lighting the Way

Luminary Project proposes solutions for a safer, cleaner environment.

The Luminary Project: Nurses Lighting the Way to Environmental Health is a new Web-based tool promoting the work that nurses do to improve human health by improving the health of the environment. The Web site describes how nurses are leading the way toward safer hospitals; cleaner air, land, and water; and a cleaner environment for children.

Q: How can I learn about the negative health effects of environmental hazards so that I can play an active role in change?

A: The Luminary Project: Nurses Lighting the Way to Environmental Health (www.theluminaryproject.org).

Q: Who are these nurses who are raising awareness and enhancing knowledge and skills, influencing hospital facilities' policy?

A: Luminary stories tell of LPNs and RNs in diverse roles across the country addressing issues such as waste disposal, water quality, occupational exposures, elimination of mercury, ways to reduce obesity rates, and national chemical policies.

Q: Are there nurses who focus specifically on children's environmental health protection?

A: Search the Web site for Elizabeth Blackburn, RN, outreach coordinator in the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Children's Health Protection in Washington, DC, or Janet Darrow, RN, of San Jose, California. A nursing student in Darrow's class had an

18-month-old child and was living in an older apartment. After a lecture on lead poisoning, she had her child tested and discovered elevated lead levels and the potential for neurologic damage. A team of health department experts found elevated lead levels throughout the apartment. The student reported to her school of nursing that she would not have known about the danger had it not been for this class.

Q: Are there nurses working on legislative policies to reduce or eliminate environmental contaminants?

A: Catherine Dodd, MS, RN, lobbied local and state officials to add lead screening to the routine prenatal and pediatric blood panels. She later drafted the first lead abatement safety standard in the state of California. Today, as the district director for House democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, she is working on Pelosi's legislation for increased funding for monitoring chemical body burdens accumulated over our lifetimes. Charlotte Brody, RN, cofounded Health Care Without Harm, to build the bridge between environmental activists and health care professionals to work together to phase out mercury; stop waste incineration; move toward safer materials that don't contain PVC, phthalates, or other dangerous chemicals; undertake efforts towards green building design; and encourage healthier food in health care settings.

Q: How can we integrate environmental health more effectively into nursing education curricula? Are there learning resources and teaching tools already available?

A: By clicking on the Web site's Resource Center, you will find links to other Web sites and organizations with a wide array of information, experts in the field, and educational materials. In addition, you can contact any of the luminaries who have a background in the area you would like to bring into your curriculum. They can be contacted by e-mail using the addresses provided on the site. For example, you can learn more about the University of Maryland School of Nursing's Environmental Health Education Center's curriculum by clicking on the luminary story by Barbara Sattler, RN, or on "EnvirRN" in "Resources and Tools" in the Resource Center.

Q: I live and work in Maine. How can I connect with someone here?

A: Bettie Kettell, RN, of Brunswick, Maine, reports that "we now have a recycling program, a monthly newsletter, and an annual Earth Day fair. I've never done anything this big!" You can learn about her work by clicking on "Search the Stories" by region, by state, or by the luminary's name. You also can access some of her materials by clicking on Resource Center on the Web site.

Q: Is it possible to get advice or coaching from one of these luminaries on various environmental issues in different settings?

A: Many of the luminaries would be delighted to discuss their efforts and serve as mentors. Locate their e-mail addresses in their luminary story. ▼

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