

# School Environmental Health Checklist



Thunder Bay District  
**Health Unit**

THROUGHOUT THE WORLD CHILDREN SPEND THE MAJORITY OF THEIR WAKING HOURS INDOORS INCLUDING AT SCHOOL.

During these hours, they often come into contact with a variety of potentially harmful chemicals and pollutants. While the exposure levels may seem small they can add up and may contribute to asthma, learning disabilities, cancer and other chronic conditions.

This checklist can help teachers, principals, custodial staff and others identify what your school is currently doing and what changes can be made to improve the school environment.

Areas covered include:

- to and from school
- throughout the school
- in the classroom
- food prep and common eating areas
- the schoolyard
- the staff room and washrooms

These is also a section with ideas for school events and tips for curriculum related activities.



I am  
doing

I plan  
to do

N/A

## To and From School

			Place bus stops on side streets that have sidewalks so children can walk safely to them.
			Work with transportation companies to ensure that old diesel school buses are replaced with new buses that use cleaner fuels.
			Place signs in the parking lot and around the school property stating that all vehicles are prohibited from idling.
			Contact the Active & Safe Routes to School Committee for help in implementing appropriate programs that promote walking/biking to and from school. Call 625-5979 for more information.



I am doing    I plan to do    N/A

## Throughout the School

			Provide teachers with alcohol based hand sanitizers so that it is available to students (with supervision) when hand washing with soap and water is not available.
			Ensure that students are not in a room while a bleach or toxic cleaning solution is being used.
			Store all cleaners, such as bleach and disinfecting products, in an area that is locked and inaccessible to children.
			Use non-bleach products when sanitizing or disinfecting whenever possible.
			When using bleach, use it in the lowest concentration permitted and only where a disinfecting product is required.
			Keep rooms well ventilated during and after use of bleach or other cleaners.
			Take off outdoor shoes upon entering the school. Indoor shoes should be worn within the school.
			Use washable floor mats at entrance areas throughout the school.
			Make sure the school is well-ventilated with up-to-date heating and cooling systems that allow adequate air exchange.
			Ensure heating/cooling system air filters are changed or cleaned once a month, depending on the type - contact the manufacturer for details.
			Have air ducts cleaned once a year, preferably during the summer months.
			Ensure that the temperature and humidity are monitored on a weekly basis with humidity levels staying between 40%-60%.
			Ensure that mould inspections are done every six months by a registered professional.

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## Throughout the School

			Inspect for mould, cracks in walls/ceilings, water damage to ceilings and chipping paint on a weekly basis.
			Use low emission computers, electronics and equipment.
			Vacuum/wash all areas of the school as needed.
			Ensure the school is thoroughly dusted with a damp cloth on a regular basis to prevent dust build up.
			Ensure renovations are done during the summer months when students and staff are not at the school.
			Encourage the use of stairs. Elevators should only be used when necessary.
			Switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs.
			Ensure fluorescent light bulbs are not disposed of in the garbage and are taken to designated depots in the community.
			Develop a scent-free policy within the school.



I am doing    I plan to do    N/A

## In the Classroom

			Ensure classrooms are painted with latex-based paint that is "VOC free" (volatile organic compound) or is labeled "non-toxic."
			Use water-based rather than oil-based materials for arts and crafts.
			Use soybean crayons instead of petroleum/paraffin waxed crayons.
			Use recyclable paper and refillable products whenever possible such as pens, highlighters, dry-erase markers and pencils.
			Reduce the use of chalk within the classroom, as it creates harmful dust.
			Use dry erase boards and dry erase markers that don't contain xylene or VOCs.
			Integrate healthy environment lessons into classroom activities. *Refer to curriculum ideas on last page.
			Avoid making any crafts that would use dryer lint.



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N/A

## In the Classroom

			Encourage students to bring in recyclables from home to use for art projects.
			Remove unnecessary carpets in classrooms, especially in play areas.
			Discard or cover up old, worn furniture where inner foam is exposed.
			Ensure that PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastic toys have been or are in the process of being replaced by safer options. Avoid plastics with numbers 3, 6 and 7. Plastics with numbers 1, 2, 4 and 5 are safer.
			Visit Health Canada's toy recall website to ensure that toys that are toxic, broken or recalled are not used and are properly disposed of.
			Use washable linen table cloths instead of vinyl table cloths, which contain toxic PVC.
			Close windows and blinds at the end of each day.
			Avoid the use of air fresheners and candles.



I am doing    I plan to do

N/A    In the Classroom

			Vacuum and wash all classroom floors at least once a week with cleaning products that use the smallest concentration of chemicals possible for adequate sanitization.
			If nutrition breaks are taken at children's desks, before each break ensure desks are cleaned with a sanitizer approved for use around food.
			Wash all counters and tables with appropriate food safe cleaning products at the end of each day or as needed.
			Dust the classroom regularly with a damp cloth to prevent dust build-up, especially around electronics, such as computers and televisions.
			Open windows when cleaning or using solvents.
			Ensure that toxic products are sealed, labeled, and kept in locked storage, if they must be used.
			Dispose of all unused/excess toxic products as hazardous waste.





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## In the Food Prep & Common Eating Areas

			Ensure students and any foodhandlers wash their hands with plain soap and water before all meals and after using the washroom. Encourage proper foodhandler hygiene.
			Encourage the use of insulated lunch bags that are PVC free.
			Place paper plates at each microwave station for heating lunches that are packed in plastic containers. Avoid heating food in any type of plastic.
			Encourage hot foods from home be packed in a stainless steel thermos when possible.
			Clean all desks, counters and tables before and after each lunch hour with appropriate food safe sanitizing products. Contact the TBDHU at 625-5934 for appropriate product information.
			Do not sell bottled water in the school.
			Promote the use of stainless steel or glass water bottles. If these are not available, use "BPA free" (bisphenol A) plastic water bottles.
			Ensure that "BPA free" plastic water bottles are used for cold beverages only.
			Work with the Health Unit dietitian to develop a food policy that ensures that foods served in the school meet healthy food and beverage standards.
			Do not sell products that are packaged in plastic, such as plastic covered burritos, hamburgers and mini pizza's.

I am doing    I plan to do    N/A

## In the Food Prep & Common Eating Areas

			Minimize serving/selling processed foods, as they often have artificial flavours, colourings and fewer nutrients.
			Serve low mercury fish when possible.
			Serve organic, sustainable and local fresh food with an option from each of the four food groups from Canada's Food Guide every day.
			Wash and scrub fruits and vegetables well with water.
			Sell 100% fruit juices and dairy beverages instead of soft drinks or juices labelled as punch or beverage.
			Place a recycle station in the eating area with signs reminding students to recycle.
			Consider setting up a composting station which will then be transferred to the outdoor compost area.
			Provide and use cutlery and dishware that is reusable/compostable instead of disposable.
			Ensure that equipment used for cooking, such as cutting boards and containers, are discarded when cracked, chipped or scratched.
			Throw out scratched dishware. Try to use dishware that is melamine free. Porcelain, ceramic or glass dishware is recommended.
			Avoid using non-stick cookware.
			Run the dishwasher after the lunch hour when the eating area/kitchen is clear of students.

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## In the School Yard

			Plant trees and build structures in the school yard to provide shade.
			Encourage students to wear sunscreen, long sleeve shirts, pants and hats before going outdoors especially during times when the UV index is 3 or higher.
			Maintain playground equipment according to existing standards.
			Monitor the playground for safety hazards such as large pot holes, litter, large rocks or wasps/ bees nests.
			Remove any stagnant water to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in the school yard.
			Situate playground areas as far from main streets as possible to avoid collisions and exhaust inhalation.
			Encourage students to dress appropriately for the weather before going outside.
			Encourage students to wash their hands after outdoor play.



I am doing I plan to do N/A

## In the Staff Room

			Keep fridges in staff rooms clean with the use of baking soda for cleaning and deodorizing.
			Wash all counters and tables with appropriate food safe cleaning products at the end of each day.
			Discourage the use of disposable cups. All staff members should bring their own mug from home. If disposable cups must be used provide paper cups.
			Use reusable cutlery and dishware instead of disposable.
			Ensure that non-toxic dish detergent is used.
			Use cloth tablecloths instead of toxic vinyl cloths.
			Encourage staff to avoid heating food in plastic and provide real or paper plates near the microwave for heating food that is carried in plastic.
			Place a recycling station in the staff room where plastic, paper, glass and cans will be disposed of properly.
			Set up a composting station for staff which is then transferred to the outdoor compost at the end of each day.



I am doing    I plan to do    N/A

## In the Washroom/Change Room

			Ensure that paper towel and toilet paper are made from recycled products.
			Ensure that there is adequate ventilation especially in washrooms where there is excess water vapour and toxic cleaners are being used.
			Use vinyl-free shower curtains in the shower area or air out ("off-gas") a new vinyl shower curtain before using it.
			Ensure that there are fans that can be used after shower use to reduce mould build-up.
			Discourage the use of scented personal care products such as hairsprays, certain shampoos/conditioners and perfumes.
			Ensure washrooms and change rooms are cleaned when students and staff are not in school.
			Use "eco-friendly" soap in the washrooms and shower areas.



## During a School Event

- Choose paper napkins and towels made of recyclable materials.
- Use washable and reusable tablecloths instead of plastic, paper or vinyl.
- Provide reusable/compostable dishware rather than disposable or provide recyclable dishware such as paper cups, plates and utensils.
- Serve healthy, organic, sustainable and local food incorporating as many food groups as possible.
- Minimize food packaging by buying food in bulk for the event.
- Provide healthy drink choices such as milk, 100% fruit juice or water.
- Ensure that beverages are served in recyclable or reusable containers.
- Prepare a recycling station that is visible to all attending the event.
- Ensure that the area chosen for the event has been cleaned and dusted especially in areas where food is being served.
- Use decorations that can be recycled such as plants rather than balloons or have students create decorations out of recycled materials.



## Curriculum Ideas

- Plant a school garden with fruits and vegetables that can be served at lunch hour and snack times. The garden can also be used for various lessons within the classroom.
- Start a student-led recycling program within your school providing delivery and pick-up of blue bins to each classroom each day.
- Hold a student poster contest with an environmental health theme and display the winner's work in the school hallways.
- Encourage students to bring in recyclables from home, such as cans and cardboard, to use for art projects.
- Create sculptures in art class using recycled and found materials such as clay.
- Investigate the process of vermicomposting by setting up a sealed miniature composter with worms in the classroom and observing what happens over time.
- Take a field trip to a recycling plant.
- Have students create their own personal care products by providing a few recipes and recycled glass jars to store the products.
- Have students write letters to local Members of Parliament about a chosen environmental health issue.
- Visit [www.ontarioecoschools.org](http://www.ontarioecoschools.org) for a collection of environmental learning activities for elementary schools.

## Where can I get more information?

Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment  
[www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca](http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca)

EarthWise Thunder Bay  
[www.earthwisethunderbay.com](http://www.earthwisethunderbay.com)

EcoSuperior  
[www.ecosuperior.com](http://www.ecosuperior.com)

Health Canada  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

Thunder Bay District Health Unit  
[tbdhu.com/hbhf/ceh](http://tbdhu.com/hbhf/ceh)

## DISTRICT OFFICES

### Geraldton

P.O. Box 1360  
510 Hogarth Avenue West  
Geraldton, ON P0T 1M0  
(807) 854-0454

### Manitouwadge

P.O. Box 385  
Manitouwadge Health Care Centre  
1 Health Care Cres.  
Manitouwadge, ON P0T 2C0  
(807) 826-4061

### Marathon

P.O. Box 384  
Marathon Library Building  
24 Peninsula Rd.  
Marathon, ON P0T 2E0  
(807) 229-1820

### Nipigon

P.O. Box 15  
Nipigon District Memorial Hospital  
125 Hogan Rd.  
Nipigon, ON P0T 2J0  
(807) 887-3031

### Schreiber

P.O. Box 698  
Jack Stokes Medical Building  
501 Scotia St.  
Schreiber, ON P0T 2S0  
(807) 824-2413