

Indiana Department of Environmental Management

Lori F. Kaplan, Commissioner

Text as prepared for: 5-Star Environmental Recognition of Child Care Facilities

Date presented: February 16, 2000

Location: Robin Run Day Care, Indianapolis

(Text does not include verbatim comments)

Good afternoon. I'm Lori Kaplan, Commissioner of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management. Thank you for coming today and joining us as we recognize two child care facilities that are going above and beyond what the rules require to provide a healthy environment for our children.

Along with our air, water and land, children are one of our most valuable resources.

And, Indiana child care facilities are playing an increasing role in the development of our children.

And now, I'm happy to introduce Judy O'Bannon, the first lady of Indiana.

(First Lady Judy O'Bannon gave a short speech.)

Research tells us that 90% of a child's brain develops by age four. That is why it is essential to provide our children with a safe, clean environment. Many children spend a good part of their early lives in child care facilities.

Most environmental regulations are written for adults, but pound for pound, children's bodies assimilate more food, water, and toxins than adults. Many Hoosier children are being exposed to toxins such as lead, mercury, and radon in their own homes. 9.8% of Indiana children have blood lead levels at which permanent damage begins. Exposure to excessive levels of lead can cause learning disabilities, decreased growth, hyperactivity, dizziness and impaired hearing.

In 1997, Indiana had 311 reported cases of children exposed to mercury from broken thermometers alone. Mercury is a nerve toxin that can impair the way we see, hear, walk, and talk.

The Surgeon General has warned that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States today. Only smoking causes more lung cancer deaths.

Indiana is the first state to implement such a bold environmental education campaign for child care facilities. IDEM has teamed up with Governor Frank O'Bannon's Building Bright Beginnings Campaign to make Indiana a safer place for all Hoosiers, especially children.

Mrs. O'Bannon kicked the 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program for Child Care Facilities off last year at a press event in Indianapolis. Since that time, stars have been awarded to 53 child care facilities in 30 different counties. This program is a cooperative effort - IDEM works with the Family and Social Services Administration and the Indiana State Department of Health to implement this program.

The 5-Star recognition program helps child care facilities clearly understand the environmental, health and safety regulations that they must comply with, and then gives them a mechanism to go *beyond* the rules and regulations to be stewards of our children's health and well being.

IDEM has created a clear, easy-to-understand compliance manual for child care facility directors. The manual is available at no cost to participating child care facilities. A self assessment was also developed to allow directors to determine the environmental risks at their facilities. IDEM's Office of Pollution Prevention and Technical Assistance provides free, confidential, phone and on-site assistance.

To recognize their efforts, IDEM will award stars to facilities based on their level of commitment and achievement. IDEM will then recognize the facilities publicly. Facilities can earn up to five stars based on their performance in managing three areas:

- Environmental Threats such as lead, asbestos, radon, mercury, and other hazardous substances.
- Health and Safety such as chemical and building safety, fire and emergency planning, and bloodborne pathogens.
- Environmental Stewardship such as recycling, energy efficiency, and education and outreach to families.

IDEM wants to help the facilities be as successful as they can. We have provided free lead risk assessments to child care facilities. IDEM will soon be offering asbestos inspections to child care facilities applying for the 5-star program. Child care facilities will only have to pay for the cost of sample analysis.

A large component of the recognition program is the education component. We must empower parents with good information to make them better consumers, and give child care providers resources to make their centers the safest and healthiest they can be for our children.

IDEM applauds the childcare facilities who have accepted taken the extra steps to provide their children with a safe and healthy environment.

(First Lady Judy O'Bannon and Lori Kaplan presented awards to the facility.)

Today we are recognizing Conejo Creative Developmental Child Care and Robin's Nest N.B.A. They are the first childcare facilities in Marion County to achieve the full 5 stars. Some of the steps they've taken to achieve this included testing their drinking water for lead, looking for sources of mercury, and testing for radon.

(Quintina Teipen, owner of Conejo Creative Development Child Care was introduced.)

Because Conejo uses gas heating, they've purchased a carbon monoxide detector and have begun a regular maintenance schedule. Conejo also began recycling their fluorescent light bulbs. They made changes at their facility to keep cleaning agents out of the range of children. Finally Conejo has taken steps toward implementing integrated pest management practices. Congratulations Conejo on all your efforts to protect the children in your care and toward educating their parents on these environmental threats that could be present in their homes. Quintina Teipen from Conejo is here to accept this award.

(Award plaque presented to Quintina Teipen.)

(Kent Kirkwood, CEO of NBA Robin Run Village and Gaye Ireland, Director of Robin's Nest Childcare Center were introduced.)

Robin's Nest N.B.A. has also tested their water for lead, tested the classrooms for radon, and has investigated any locations in their facility that may contain mercury. They have worked closely with their maintenance staff to begin a recycling program for the fluorescent light bulbs and has purchased a mercury spill kit in the event that a mercury exposure should occur. Robin's Nest has developed an extremely organized system for managing many of the emergency plans they have for the child care facility. Through this program Robin's Nest became aware of several issues related to indoor air quality and asthma that had not previously been thought about, including, no longer allowing parents to run their cars near the entrance of the facility and sending notes home to parents about any pets with fur that are in the classrooms here. We appreciate all you have done here at Robin's Nest. Gaye Ireland from Robin's Nest and Kent Kirkwood from will N.B.A. Robin Run Village will be accepting the award for Robin's Nest.

(Gaye Ireland accepted award and Kent Kirkwood gave a brief speech.)

Please join us as we tour Robin's Nest's facility.