

Commissioner Lori F. Kaplan

Text as prepared for: Council of State Government's 2001 Innovation Award

Date presented: Thursday, February 14, 2002, 11:00 AM

Location: Indiana Statehouse Rotunda, Indianapolis

(Text does not include verbatim comments)

First Lady Judy O'Bannon:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here

- What a great day for Indiana!
- It's an honor to accept the Council of State Government's 2001 Innovation Award on behalf of my husband, Governor Frank O'Bannon, and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

5-Star Environmental Recognition Program

- Three years ago, we began a program to recognize child-care providers for their initiative to reduce environmental threats at their facilities.
- And three years later, we are here celebrating a major milestone of that program's success.
- The 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program for child-care facilities recognizes child-care providers that are willing to do more for the environment and for children's safety than the rules require.
- Providers who go above and beyond environmental regulations to protect the environment, their employees and the children for which they care are recognized for their efforts by being awarded stars.
- Since the program began, more than 70 child-care facilities throughout the state have been awarded stars.

Indiana is the first state in the nation to take on such a bold environmental education campaign for child-care facilities.

- But our state may not be alone much longer...
- Other states have contacted Indiana to learn more about how our program works and to get advice on starting similar initiatives.
- Success is contagious!
- We welcome these calls and are more than happy to serve as the stepping stone for others to learn about the impact of environmental threats on children's health.

- It has been my honor to participate in several aspects of this program, including being involved in a number of presentations to recognize these exceptional child-care facilities. The pride that these child-care providers show is fantastic.
- So as Indiana continues to be a leader in increasing environmental awareness and reducing the risks that our children face, we will ensure that all Hoosier children grow up in a cleaner, healthier Indiana.
- Thank you once again. Now I would like to turn the microphone over to IDEM's Commissioner Lori Kaplan. Congratulations on your award and this great program!

IDEM Commissioner Lori Kaplan:

Thank you Judy.

- We are truly honored to receive this recognition.
- It might seem strange that the Indiana Department of **Environmental Management** is accepting an award for a program dealing with child-care facilities.
- After all, we aren't the experts when it comes to teaching a child. In fact, the thought of teaching a classroom of four-year olds all day would have me running for the door!
- Typically, our agency works with businesses, industries and other regulatory agencies. But about three years ago IDEM began working with a new kind of business – child-care facilities.
- I am well aware that the most important natural resource anyone can protect isn't the air, water or land—but our children.
- After all... we're talking today about the protectors of tomorrow's environment.

IDEM wanted to meet First Lady Judy O'Bannon's Challenge.

- When the governor and first lady started the Building Bright Beginnings Initiative and asked all state agencies to investigate how they could improve the lives of young children, we took a look at our agency and wondered where Hoosier children fit in with IDEM's goals and initiatives.
- Of the many discussions we had, one was specifically intriguing.
- We asked ourselves: When are children most susceptible to the dangers of pollution and where are they most likely to encounter these hazards?
- We learned that child-care facilities play an increasingly important role in the every day development of our children.
- In Indiana, **more than 100,000** of the state's children are in child-care.

- And when you couple this number with the fact that 90 percent of a child's brain develops by the age of 6, we knew that child-care providers had a tremendous opportunity to impact a child's future.
- This is why it is essential to provide our children with a safe, nurturing environment to learn and play in
- For many Hoosier families, that environment is a child-care facility.

As an environmental agency, we often deal with environmental threats such as lead paint, asbestos and radon.

- We knew we could provide public education as well as hands on assistance in these, and many other areas.
- The facts are:
 - Almost 10 percent of Indiana children have blood lead levels high enough to cause permanent brain damage and
 - Indiana has more than 300 reported cases of children exposed to mercury from broken thermometers every year.
 - After learning this, we realized there is so much we can do to promote a healthier environment for children.
 - So with this in mind, we developed the 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program for child-care facilities to encourage Hoosier child-care providers to be aware of the potential environmental harms in their facilities and to reward the facilities that address these concerns.

I would like to thank a few folks who made today possible.

- I would like to thank the Council of State Governments for coming to Indiana to present us with this honor.
- Thanks to the Family and Social Services Administration, the Marion County Health Department, Cinergy and the many others who continue to participate in the review committee for working with us to get this program up and running and supporting us along the way.
- Thanks to the many IDEM staff members who work so hard each day on our child-care program and our other children's environmental health initiatives.
- Thanks to the child-care facilities for working with us and for serving as role models. I am thrilled to accept this award on behalf of IDEM and all of the participating 5-star child-care facilities!