Issue: School Monitoring Initiative

Background: On March 31, 2009, EPA released a list of priority schools for air quality monitoring, as part of an initiative to understand whether outdoor toxic air pollution poses health concerns to schoolchildren. The initial monitoring will take place at 62 schools in 22 states. EPA selected the schools using a number of factors, including results from a computer modeling analysis, results from a recent newspaper series on air toxics at schools, and in consultation with state and local air agencies. In Ohio, six schools were chosen: Elm Street Elementary in Wauseon, OH; La Croft Elementary in East Liverpool, OH; Academy of Arts and Humanities in Warren, OH; The Ohio Valley Educational Service Center and Warren Elementary in Marietta, OH; and Whitwell Elementary in Ironton, OH.

EPA is following an aggressive timeline to begin sampling air outside the schools, focusing on some schools near large industries and some schools in urban areas, where emissions of air toxics come from a mix of large and small industries, cars, trucks, buses and other sources. The agency is monitoring for chemicals commonly found in many areas of the country that may have harmful effects if people are exposed to them at high enough levels over a long period of time. Monitoring will be performed for the following chemicals at each school:

- Elm Street Elementary—Diisocyanates and volatile organic compounds (VOCs)
- La Croft Elementary—PM_{10} metals
- Academy of Arts and Sciences—PM_{10} metals, VOCs, lead, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).
- The Ohio Valley Educational Service Center—PM_{10} metals and lead
- Warren Elementary—PM_{10} metals and lead
- Whitwell Elementary—PM_{10} metals, VOCs, PAHs

Once the air toxics data for a school are quality assured, EPA will analyze the results to estimate how exposure to the outdoor air around the school might affect health over the long term. If EPA finds a low potential for health concerns from chronic exposure to air toxics at a school, the agency may cease monitoring at that school. If potential health concerns are high, EPA will take steps to mitigate the pollution causing the problems. If EPA cannot estimate potential effects based on the initial phase of monitoring, EPA may continue monitoring to obtain additional data.

Messages:

- Being chosen for monitoring is not necessarily indicative of a problem.
- From 1990 to 2005, emissions of air toxics in the United States declined 41 percent, as a result of federal and state regulations, along with local emission reduction programs.
- Levels of air toxics can vary widely from place to place depending upon a number of factors including the amount and types of industry nearby, proximity to heavily traveled or congested roadways, and weather patterns.

Contact: Jaime Wagner, 312-886-9402, wagner.jaime@epa.gov or Motria Caudill, 312-886-0267, caudill.motria@epa.gov