In This Newsletter...

Hastings Professor John Peters Honored for Environmental Health Achievements

SCEHSC Intern Featured in Los Angeles Times and USC News

Asthma and Stress

Carrie Breton, ScD, Commended for Quality of Research

Air Pollution from Freeways Extends Further than Previously Thought

Pesticide Exposure Found to Increase Risk of Parkinson’s Disease

Community Outreach and Education Program Coordinates Ongoing Work of THE Impact Project

In the News...

FALL 2009 NEWSLETTER
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Hastings Professor John Peters Honored for Environmental Health Achievements

Dr. John Peters, Hastings Professor and director of the division of environmental health at the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California has recently received multiple honors recognizing his scientific and public health achievements. Dr. Peters is the founding director of both the USC Children's Health Study and the Southern California Environmental Health Sciences Center.
Dr. Peters is the first recipient of an award created in his honor by the Environmental and Occupational Health Assembly of the American Thoracic Society: the 2009 John M. Peters award. The award was made “In Appreciation of a Lifetime of Leadership, Research, and Devoted Service to the Pursuit of Respiratory Health.”

Harvard University also honored Dr. Peters with its School of Public Health’s Alumni Award of Merit. Dr. Peters, who received his ScD degree from Harvard, was honored for his work on the health effects of air pollution, magnetic fields, asbestos, vinyl chloride and other chemicals in the work and general environments.

And in a celebration of Dr. Peters’ notable career, a USC forum presented the highlights of his 35+ years of accomplishments, including presentations by several of Peters’ colleagues from USC and other institutions, including Harvard, Brown, Brigham Young University and the University of Massachusetts, Lowell.

At the celebration, Penny Newman, executive director of the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCAEJ), a Riverside, Calif.-based nonprofit organization working on environmental justice issues, hailed Peters and his colleagues...
for their work with community groups. “Certainly we have seen the scientific research that John Peters has been involved in, and that is well documented,” said Newman. “But what isn't documented are the thousands of human lives that he has helped make better.”

Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen Puliafito thanked Peters for his leadership and commitment to the school. He also announced the formation of the John Peters Environmental Education Research Fund, which will help to continue Peters’ work by supporting students and post doctoral candidates researching environmental health. Persons interested in making a donation to the fund may contact Kavita Munjal at 323-442-2358 or Munjal@usc.edu.

Read more about John Peters...

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SCEHSC Intern Featured in Los Angeles Times and USC News

By Meghan Lewit (HSC Weekly)

Fifteen-year-old Otana Jakpor’s essay on how she spent her summer vacation would include leading demonstrations on how to map demographic data and conducting research on diesel emissions from locomotives and other railyard equipment.

The high school senior recently interned at the Southern California Environmental Health Sciences Center (SCEHSC), directed by Frank Gilliland at the Keck School of Medicine, where she focused on using U.S. Census Bureau information to map and study the demographics of populations living near rail yards.

Photo: Sara Reeve, HSC Weekly

Environmental Health Sciences Center (SCEHSC), directed by Frank Gilliland at the Keck School of Medicine, where she focused on using U.S. Census Bureau information to map and study the demographics of populations living near rail yards.

View USC article View LA Times article

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Asthma and Stress

Children with stressed-out parents may be more likely to develop asthma when the children are exposed to high levels of traffic-related pollution and tobacco smoke, according to a new study published by Center investigators.
According to the new study, the risk of asthma linked to traffic-related pollution was significantly higher for children of parents reporting high levels of stress.

HSC Weekly Press Release

American Journal of Public Health Special Supplement on Environmental Justice features Center article on “The Burden of Disease from Air Pollution”

A recent study published by Center members in the American Journal of Public Health connects heavy traffic corridors Long Beach and Riverside to a large portion of preventable childhood asthma. The study estimated that 9 percent of all childhood asthma cases in Long Beach and 6 percent in Riverside were linked to living near traffic pollution. This study is one of the first to estimate the number of cases, or “burden of disease,” associated with traffic in high risk communities.

The entire special issue of the AJPH, with many interesting environmental health articles, is available for free online.

HSC Weekly Press Release

Carrie Breton, ScD, Commended for Quality of Research
Dr. Carrie Breton, assistant professor and junior investigator at USC, has been recognized by the National Institution of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) for the quality of her research in her study on prenatal tobacco smoke (PTS) exposure and DNA methylation.

Advisor John Peters, MD, ScD, says he has "witnessed her transition from budding young investigator to the independent faculty researcher she is today." (NIEHS Newsletter)

Read more about Carrie and her work …

Air Pollution from Freeways Extends Further than Previously Thought

By Sarah Anderson, UCLA School of Public Health
Investigators from UCLA, USC, and the California Air Resources Board have found that during the hours before sunrise, freeway air pollution extends much further away from the freeway than previously thought.

Air pollutants from Interstate 10 in Santa Monica extend as far as 1.5 miles downwind, based on recent measurements from a research team headed by Center member Dr. Arthur Winer of UCLA and UCLA professor Dr. Suzanne Paulson. Among the authors was Center member Dr. Scott Fruin of USC. In their study, the distance measured is 10 times greater than previously measured. Daytime pollutant impacts from roadways and may have important health implications, since most people are in their homes during that time and outdoor pollutants enter buildings and homes. The Santa Monica Daily Press published an article about the study. For more information, see the press release.

The same team of researchers published an article about pollution from the Santa Monica Airport, which received significant press coverage.

**Pesticide Exposure Found to Increase Risk of Parkinson’s Disease**

By Mark Wheeler

UCLA Newsroom

In a study of people who live in the Central Valley of California who have Parkinson's disease, researchers found that years of exposure to pesticides increased the risk of Parkinson's by 75 percent. Reporting in the American Journal of Epidemiology, UCLA Center member Beate Ritz and co-investigators found
that Central Valley residents who lived within 500 meters of fields sprayed between 1974 and 1999 had a 75 percent increased risk for Parkinson's. For more information, see press release.

Community Outreach and Education Program Coordinates Ongoing Work of THE Impact Project

The Center’s outreach program is coordinating an academic/community collaborative called THE Impact Project, which is working to find healthy solutions to the harmful impacts of goods movement.

THE Impact Project recently launched an interactive map of ports and railyards across the U.S. and is providing technical assistance to other port and railyard communities.

Its work is funded by NIEHS, along with grants from The California Endowment and The Kresge Foundation.

Learn more about THE Impact Project

In the News…

- Ed Avol was quoted in an article about ship emissions in the DC Bureau

- Lourdes Baezconde-Garbanati is the joint principal investigator in a new study which will research narratives as a way to learn and retain information about such important topics as cancer.

- Christopher Haiman, assistant professor of preventive medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, was named one of six national researchers to receive a grant from the Genes, Environment and Health Initiative of the National Institutes of Health.

- Carla Truax, Center Outreach Coordinator, presented a session on air pollution at Pacoima Beautiful, a community-based organization working on diesel pollution. Ms. Truax is quoted in an article published in El Nuevo Sol *En Español.

- Rob McConnell received the Robert M. Zweig, MD Memorial Award from the South Coast Air Quality Management District at its 2009 Clean Air Awards.
-Beate Ritz of UCLA was honored in November 2009 with an award from the American Parkinson Disease Association "in recognition of outstanding contributions to the medical and scientific communities and for her work towards the advancement of Parkinson's disease research."

This newsletter is produced by the Community Outreach and Education Program of the Southern California Environmental Health Sciences Center (SCEHSC) based at the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California (USC), with special thanks to: Andrea Hricko, Carla Truax, Brittany Eckersley and student workers Kimberly Knabel and Marrall Bagerdjian.

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