

# NMA Council on Medical Legislation & Environmental Health Task Force Report

2014

August, 2014

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**At the Colloquium in March 2014, Dr. Walter Faggett named Mark A. Mitchell MD, MPH to chair the Council on Medical Legislation. CML worked closely with the Environmental Health Task Force, with the support and consent of NMA's 114<sup>th</sup> President, Michael Lenoir M.D.**

**Council on Medical Legislation Members:** Drs. Mark Mitchell MD, MPH (CT) (chair) Anthony Ibe, MD (DC), Denice Logan, MD (MI), Barbara Nabrit Stevens, MD (FL), Alice Coombs, MD (MA), Niva Lubin-Johnson, MD, (IL), Warren Jones, MD (MS), Mark Mitchell, MD (DC), Leon McDougale, MD (OH), Samuel Hunter, MD (VA)

**Environmental Health Task Force Members:** Drs. Mark Mitchell (Co-chair), Jewel Crawford (Co-chair), Cedric Bright, Millicent Collins, Frances Dunston, Cheryl Holder, Edith Mitchell, Albert Morris, Barbara Nabrit-Stephens, Cynthia Paige, Myrtis Sullivan, Dyann Waugh, Leonard Weather, and Yolanda Whyte

## 2014 Highlights

1. NMA and George Mason University conducted the first ever physician survey on health effects of climate change with surprisingly impressive results.
  - a. It showed that 88% of physicians surveyed are already seeing health effects from climate change, and that NMA physicians would like to advocate on this issue.
  - b. We held a press event which got media coverage in 7 newspapers and websites and 3 radio interviews, including the Tom Joyner Morning Show
  - c. We held a Congressional Briefing for 60 Hill staffers
2. NMA sponsored the first meeting of 15 national physician and nursing organizations on environmental health. The groups wanted to form a consortium, to share professional educational materials, maintain communications, and to meet again at next year's NMA Colloquium.
3. Grants: The Environmental Health Task Force was able to raise \$117,500 in the first half of 2014 to support its activities and the Colloquium, including \$22,500 in overhead (general support) for NMA. Funding was received from John Merck Fund (not affiliated with the pharmaceutical company), MomentUs/ecoAmerica, George Mason University, Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families Campaign, and Earthjustice

## **Advocacy**

1. 22 NMA members made Hill visits to 14 congressional offices to advocate for health protective chemical policy and solving the "doc fix" Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) Medicare reimbursement rate problem during the NMA Colloquium in March 2014. Hill staff were talking about it for weeks afterward.
2. Dr. Yolanda Whyte and Dr. Mark Mitchell participated in Hill visits to 13 congressional offices during a Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families Campaign Health advocacy day, and encouraged participation by National Hispanic Medical Association
3. NMA was invited to several White House meetings on climate change and invited to support the EPA rule to reduce carbon pollution from electric power plants, as well as to cosponsor a conference call on this issue given by President Obama
4. Dr. Joia Crear Perry of the NMA's New Orleans affiliate, contacted Congressman Cedric Richmond to ask him not to support the weak House chemical bill
5. Dr. Claude Tellis of the Louisiana Medical Association, worked with state Rep. Badon to get a formaldehyde study bill introduced in the Louisiana legislature
6. Dr. Mitchell worked with Safer States and the National Black Caucus of State Legislators to get formaldehyde legislation introduced in South Carolina and Louisiana
7. Dr. Whyte and others met with state Senator John Albers on potential Georgia chemical policy introduction
8. Dr. Mitchell met with EPA staff in July 2014 to discuss how we can work better together around chemical policy and climate change health effects.
9. In a testament to our effectiveness, in late 2013 the American Chemistry Council hired an African American physician to counter the influence of the NMA and to try to get health organizations, especially organizations representing health professionals of color, to support bad chemical bills in the House and Senate. We believe that she is no longer employed there.

## **Letters**

1. Dr. Michael LeNoir, NMA's 114<sup>th</sup> President, wrote a letter to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee asking them to strengthen Senate Chemical Safety Improvement Act in August 2013
2. NMA also sent a letter opposing the House bill Chemicals in Commerce Act in April 2014, we also worked with the National Hispanic Medical Association to get their opposition letter developed.
3. Dr. LeNoir also signed onto a letter in March 2014 to EPA objecting to their adding over 100 fragrances that are known sensitizers, insufficiently tested for sensitizations or repeat-dose toxicants to EPA's "Design for the Environment" labeling program for environmentally preferable products.
4. The Environmental Health Task Force submitted a letter for the public record supporting EPA's proposed new rule to regulate formaldehyde in wood products in October 2013

## **News Articles**

1. Dr. Mitchell wrote an article on state chemical policy that was published in the August 2013 issue of The Legislator, the magazine of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators
2. Articles on climate and health were published in seven newspapers or websites as stated above
3. NMA issued a press release in support of the White House Climate Action Plan and the EPA power plant rule on carbon pollution

## **Resolutions**

1. Dr. Niva Lubin-Johnson worked with the American Medical Association's Minority Affairs Council to pass a strong AMA chemical policy in November 2013.

## **Medical Education**

Environmental Health Task Force has continued to provide environmental health education on chemical policy and other issues to NMA members and other health professionals.

1. Task Force co-chair Dr. Mitchell presented at the following Regional Conferences:
  - NMA Region I conference in St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands before 40 attendees- May 23, 2014
  - NMA Region II conference in Washington, DC before 20 attendees- April 18, 2014
  - NMA Region V conference in New Orleans, LA before 40 attendees- April 25, 2014
2. Dr. Mitchell and EPA Chief of Staff, Gwendolyn Keyes Fleming presented at the National Colloquium on African American Health to 75 attendees in March of 2014.
3. Dr. Jewel Crawford, Dr. Whyte, and Dr. Mitchell, along with Mustafa Ali, Senior Advisor to the EPA Administrator, are scheduled to present at the Mazique Symposium at the 2014 NMA Annual Convention in Hawaii on August 2, 2014.

## **Future Activities**

Environmental Health Task Force is proposing a Bylaws change to become a Council of the House of Delegates and a resolution to establish an account within NMA, in order to give it a more appropriate and permanent structure under which to work

Council on Medical Legislation and Environmental Health Task Force are proposing several resolution around climate change and chemical policy

In response to the NMA Climate and Health Survey, incoming President, Dr. Dusty Sanders and the Environmental Health Task Force are working on establishing a partnership with ecoAmerica/MomentUs to promote health facilities and NMA partner organizations (e.g. health, fraternal, civil rights organizations) adopting policies and implementing procedures to reduce their carbon footprints and become more sustainable as a way to reduce health effects of climate change. NMA will also be pursuing other support to build our capacity to engage on climate change national policy.