

Harvard SRP collaboration honored for risk communication

By Sara Mishamandani

The [Kids + Chemical Safety website](http://www.kidschemicalsafety.org/),

(<http://www.kidschemicalsafety.org/>)

supported in part by the NIEHS-funded Harvard Superfund Research Program (SRP) Research Translation Core (RTC), received the 2013 Risk Communication Award Jan. 15 from the [Alliance for Chemical Safety](http://www.acs-online.org/).

(<http://www.acs-online.org/>)

The site provides up-to-date information on health hazards of chemicals and the safe use of chemicals around children.

"We wanted to find a way to use expertise at the Harvard SRP Center, related to health effects of metals and their mixtures in children, to inform public audiences," said Katherine von Stackelberg, Sc.D., lead on the Harvard website effort. "We have been partnering with the website for the past year, which was already set up by [Toxicology Excellence for Risk Assessment](http://www.tera.org/) (TERA). This strategic collaboration allows us to hear directly from parents and others about their concerns." TERA is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to scientific collaboration and broad communication of risk science in support of public health protection.

Chemical hazards and children's safety

Through the [Ask an Expert](http://www.kidschemicalsafety.org/ask.html)

(<http://www.kidschemicalsafety.org/ask.html>)

feature on the site, individuals can submit questions or concerns related to chemical exposures and child safety. A group of peer reviewers, including von Stackelberg, then have the opportunity to weigh in on the response, ensuring peer review of all website content. Articles available on the site include the Ask an Expert responses, as well as topics chosen by reviewers, such as chemical safety concerns that may be receiving media attention.

"I serve as the point of contact for Harvard SRP and send out all requests for review and comment to other SRP researchers," said von Stackelberg. "People from different organizations, including Harvard SRP, work together constructively to provide information based on the current state of the science."

Encouraging bidirectional communication

"We were attracted to this partnership because we want to enhance our bidirectional engagement with the general public," said von Stackelberg. "We disseminate information through the Harvard SRP website, seminars, and social media, but the Kids + Chemical Safety site gives us an opportunity to hear what people want to know about children's environmental health and chemical safety."

The Harvard RTC is actively exploring cross-disciplinary methods for research synthesis, gathering evidence from many different sources to answer a particular question. The Harvard Center for Risk Analysis, which hosts the Harvard RTC, held a [workshop](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hcra/research-synthesis-project/)

(<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hcra/research-synthesis-project/>) in October 2013 to discuss methods for research synthesis and the challenges of combining research to promote evidence-based decision-making. At the 2013 Society for Risk Analysis annual meeting, von Stackelberg gave a [presentation](http://birenheide.com/sra/2013AM/program/singlesession.php3?sessid=M2-A&order=2#2)

(<http://birenheide.com/sra/2013AM/program/singlesession.php3?sessid=M2-A&order=2#2>)

on the results of a systematic review using an adverse outcome pathway framework, based on the Harvard research synthesis workshop.

"The opportunity to review and create content for the Kids + Chemical Safety website allows us to put that idea into practice by evaluating scientific evidence and incorporating uncertainty to help parents make their own informed decisions based on scientific findings," said von Stackelberg.



Harvard SRP RTC co-leader von Stackelberg is working with TERA and other website supporters to answer difficult questions related to children and chemical safety. (Photo courtesy of Katherine von Stackelberg)



The Kids + Chemical Safety site features a variety of topics from the benefits and risks of flame retardants in homes, to chemical risks in children's toys, as well as information to help parents better understand science terminology when researching chemical hazards.

(Sara Mishamandani is a research and communication specialist for MDB Inc., a contractor for the NIEHS Superfund Research Program and Division of Extramural Research and Training.)

The Environmental Factor is produced monthly by the [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences \(NIEHS\)](#)

(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/>)

, Office of Communications and Public Liaison. The content is not copyrighted, and it can be reprinted without permission. If you use parts of Environmental Factor in your publication, we ask that you provide us with a copy for our records. We welcome your [comments and suggestions](#).
(bruskec@niehs.nih.gov)

This page URL: NIEHS website: <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/>

Email the Web Manager at webmanager@niehs.nih.gov