

## **NIEHS Superfund research training spurs collaboration with EPA**

*By Sara Mishamandani*

The University of Pennsylvania Superfund Research Program (Penn SRP) Center worked closely with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to plan a day of training on mobile air monitoring technology, groundwater restoration, and community involvement for staff from the [EPA mid-Atlantic regional office](#)

(<http://www2.epa.gov/aboutepa/epa-region-3-mid-atlantic>)

The Penn SRP Center and the EPA regional office both work to reduce the health effects of asbestos, which is a significant health concern in some areas of Pennsylvania. The event provided attendees an opportunity to exchange innovative environmental health research.

The Penn SRP Center was established last year with NIEHS funding to study asbestos exposure pathways that lead to diseases. The Center evolved out of the Penn [Center of Excellence in Environmental Toxicology](#)

(<http://ceet.upenn.edu/>)

(CEET), which is funded through the NIEHS Environmental Health Core Centers program, because of concerns from the community living near the [BoRit Asbestos Superfund site](#)

(<http://www.epa.gov/reg3hwmd/npl/PAD981034887.htm>)

in Ambler, Pennsylvania.

The director of the Penn SRP Research Translation Core (RTC), Richard Pepino, arranged the training as part of the Core's mission to solidify partnerships among EPA, CEET, and Penn SRP. The daylong event featured demonstration of a new EPA mobile air monitoring technology called the Trace Atmospheric Gas Analyzer Van, discussion of completed groundwater restoration actions, and the sharing of new strategies for community involvement. More than 80 EPA staff, in addition to SRP researchers and trainees, participated in the event.

### **Penn SRP Center asbestos research**

Ian Blair, Ph.D., director of the Penn SRP Center, described ongoing research at the Center to address community concerns in Ambler. The Center is working to better understand how asbestos moves through the environment. Researchers also study how asbestos can be remediated, how to detect exposure, and how exposure and susceptibility affect health outcomes.

Blair discussed the use of novel high-resolution mass spectrometry-based methods to identify new biomarkers of mesothelioma, which is an aggressive cancer related to asbestos exposure. He recently discovered, in findings that are not yet published, three serum lipid biomarkers that are more sensitive and specific for detecting mesothelioma than protein biomarkers currently in use.

Blair also discussed how the Penn SRP RTC is informing stakeholders — in Ambler, as well as at local, state, and federal agencies — about research progress. Penn SRP has made significant progress in creating partnerships with EPA staff and reaching out to community members in Ambler.

### **Fostering collaboration**

Trevor Penning, Ph.D., CEET director and Penn SRP Center deputy director, welcomed the participants and challenged them to form new partnerships. Penn researchers learned about EPA technologies and how they might facilitate CEET research. The session that demonstrated the capability of the EPA mobile air monitoring laboratory led to discussion on how this technology might be used in homes close to hydraulic fracturing sites in Pennsylvania, which is one focus of CEET.

“I find it critically important to strengthen ties with Region 3 EPA,” said Penning. “The region is faced with major environmental health issues, and by working together, we can find solutions to protect human health.”

(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.)



*Training organizers Jessica Meeker, left, Penn SRP RTC coordinator, and Root, in front of the Trace Atmospheric Gas Analyzer Van. (Photo courtesy of Jessica Meeker)*



*From left, Blair; Cecil Rodriguez, director of the EPA Region 3 Hazardous Site Cleanup Division; Charlie Root, EPA Region 3 remedial project manager; Penning; and Pepino took advantage of the opportunity to form new collaborations. (Photo courtesy of Jessica Meeker)*

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