

# ALABAMA'S

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

# HEALTH

VOLUME 38

NUMBER 11

SEPTEMBER 2005

## Public health's mission becomes clear after working in shelter after Hurricane Katrina

**E**ven though environmental supervisor Tim Hatch has been employed in public health for the past 10 years, spending four days at the Fairhope Medical Needs Shelter following Hurricane Katrina gave him a newfound understanding and appreciation of the work done by everyone in the various disciplines of public health.

"Public health stepped up when the situation arose," Hatch said. "It opened up my eyes to what public health really is. I got a lifetime of public health knowledge in one week, and I truly think our mission statement was accomplished"

Between Aug. 28 and 30, immediately before and after the hurricane struck, the team had worked at a mass care shelter at O'Rourke Elementary School in Mobile. The winds reached velocities of over 100 miles per hour. Then on Labor Day, Sept. 5, Hatch was assigned to drive a 15-passenger van from the RSA Tower to the hurricane-affected area. Two other six-passenger vans left at the same time bound for the Fairhope Medical Needs Shelter. They replaced a team from Public Health Area 1 at the facility.

His responsibility was to be the evening facility manager, and his work hours were 4 p.m. to 4 a.m.

"This was more than a makeshift hospital," Hatch said. "The nurses were doing great work. Our public health nurses really knew their stuff about medication interactions and were more than administrators. We needed people to change out their oxygen tents and colostomy bags, and

they did. When a patient called, it was 'go' time; all disciplines pitched in to help.

"I can't say enough about the tireless social workers and administrative staff, getting people flights and contacting loved ones," Hatch continued. "I believe these people in the shelter got better care than they could have



*Photo courtesy of Tim Hatch*

A few of the many public health employees who staffed shelters were the following, left to right, Sheila Underwood, Debbie Wetzel, Marie Carastro, Sherry Young, Mark Sestak, Jim Stewart, Cindy Boswell, Debbie Moulton, Tim Hatch, Elizabeth McGraw, Queen Whitfield, Stacey Neumann, Carter Sims, Beverly Morgan, Bernadette Harville and Sylvia Foreman.

*Shelter.....continued on page 3*

# CDC staff recognizes arthritis program manager

The arthritis staff of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognized Linda Austin as the nation's outstanding arthritis program manager and presented her a silver tray. Ms. Austin has been the arthritis coordinator for Alabama since the inception of state arthritis programs at CDC in 1999.

According to Lee Ann B. Ramsey, Public Health Advisor/Project Officer, CDC arthritis staff, "She has been an exemplary leader from the start and is considered THE go-to person by many of CDC's state arthritis programs who want to model Alabama's success. She has fostered exceptional collaborative partnerships within state government and the private sector. Her enthusiasm, determination, and desire to build quality arthritis programs for the people of Alabama is inspiring."

Ms. Austin has won awards from CDC for outstanding evaluation of Alabama's arthritis program and for partnership building. Alabama's work in arthritis has been featured numerous times in CDC-wide program briefings.



The CDC program staff presented Linda Austin a silver tray in recognition of her contributions to Alabama's arthritis program.

## Alabama Department of Public Health

### Mission

To serve the people of Alabama by assuring conditions in which they can be healthy.

### Value Statement

The purpose of the Alabama Department of Public Health is to provide caring, high quality and professional services for the improvement and protection of the public's health through disease prevention and the assurance of public health services to resident and transient populations of the state regardless of social circumstances or the ability to pay.

The Department of Public Health works closely with the community to preserve and protect the public's health and to provide caring quality services.

## ALABAMA'S HEALTH

*Alabama's Health* is an official monthly publication of the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease. If you would like to receive the publication or wish to submit information for future articles, please telephone requests to (334) 206-5300. Articles may be reprinted provided credit is given to the Alabama Department of Public Health. The department's Web site is <http://www.adph.org>

Donald E. Williamson, M.D.	State Health Officer
Jim McVay, Dr. P.A.	Director, Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease
Arrol Sheehan, M.A.	Editor
Takenya Stokes, J.D.	Contributing Editor
Toni Prater	Graphic Designer

Informational materials in alternative formats will be made available upon request.

# Shelter.....continued from page 1

received anywhere.”

The almost magical attentiveness to every need, the generosity and the willingness of the Fairhope community to help others is illustrated by the “wish” board, he said. On this bulletin board, shelter staff placed adhesive notes whenever a need was identified. For example, one of the shelter occupants said she regularly drank prune juice each morning, but there was none there. Within a few hours, he said, cases of prune juices had been delivered to the shelter site.

Even though the Emergency Planning kits contained virtually everything the teams needed, a woman said she only took Advil as a pain reliever. Boxes of Advil appeared before the day ended. Someone needed a hospital bed, and someone from the community provided one. Local pharmacies and supermarkets came up with any needed items. Hatch said that with all the donated food from civic organizations, churches and restaurants he probably ate better than ever before.

The Public Health Area 9 staff were very helpful. Despite multiple needs of other shelters and other recovery work, assistance was readily available through the “invaluable” SouthernLinc radios. Area Administrator Ruth Underwood, EP Coordinator Chad Kent, and Hatch’s daytime counterpart, Camilla English of the Baldwin County Health Department, knew the people to go to and did a good job in giving “cues” to others.

“The team atmosphere was super,” Hatch said.

As an environmentalist, Hatch had to prohibit a woman who arrived at the shelter with her cat from bringing her pet with her. But a local veterinarian offered to board the cat and give it shots. Later the “cat woman” was even taken to visit her pet. Other shelter workers said that after Hatch left this

same lady told workers of how he allowed her to use his personal cell phone to call her family and she referred to him as her “adopted son.”

“You really get attached to these people because it’s truly sad to hear about their experiences and their needs,” he said. “There were a couple of older men who smoked, and we would ration out cigarettes to them from the supply in the cigarette room,”

A woman was found to have a large sore on her foot, but she told the shelter workers that she didn’t want to bother anyone else with it. Her foot was taken care of as soon as the problem was known. An older woman complained about pain in her mouth from her bridge, and within five minutes a dentist had seen and treated her. This was a timely coincidence because a local dentist happened to stop by to donate supplies from his office.

Many considerations were given to the shelter. A local linen delivery company provided the linens used on the cots at no charge. The 4 a.m. pickup time for linens and garbage were necessary environmental duties for Hatch to take care of.

“The Center for Emergency Preparedness is to be commended for their forethought,” Hatch said. The kits even contained puppets, and being a little punchy from a lack of sleep the team entertained with a puppet show for adults.

“For a split moment in time, people were laughing,” Hatch said.

Hatch concluded, “I look back on it as a tough, scary and interesting experience. For my small part, I definitely had an impact on the lives of people. It was awesome, a very good experience. I did things I never thought I would do, and the team atmosphere was super. People really impressed me. I would do it again tomorrow if asked.”

## Letter of appreciation

*AThis letter was sent to Ashvin Parikh, assistant area administrator for Public Health Area 7.*

September 15, 2005

Dear Mr. Parikh:

Thank you so much for all of your support during Hurricane Katrina at the Westwood Baptist Church. I only worked with you and your staff for a short while but your professionalism and courtesy were worth remembering and being grateful for. Selma is a wonderful community. I’m thankful to have been given the opportunity to work with you.

Sincerely,  
Michelle L. McMullen  
Hampton Roads Chapter  
American Red Cross  
Newport News, Va.



# Community steps forward with care at medical needs shelter

**L**isa Freeman, moved by the horrors that befell the victims of Hurricane Katrina, went to her church, Fairhope United Methodist, to ask how she could help. A month later she views this first step as just the start of a long journey for the mother of three.

As newcomers to Fairhope, she and her husband, Dr. Andrew Freeman, had only lived in the community since March. She wanted to assist the people displaced by the hurricane in any way possible. But their church operated a preschool so hurricane evacuees were not allowed to be housed in the facility.

Not to be discouraged, she volunteered at the Fairhope Civic Center Medical Needs Shelter and soon put to use the skills she had acquired as a mass events coordinator to help ensure that the many people who wound up there had their multiple needs addressed.

“This has been a huge effort by the Fairhope community and a great opportunity to see the community at its best,” she said. “We are in a unique situation because so many people here were raised in the Gulf Coast area, have been through hurricanes, and knew what to do. It’s a very supportive community.”

While the medical needs shelter was open, local churches each took turns preparing and delivering a hot meal to the 37-bed capacity, self-sufficient shelter. Ms. Freeman said, “I never felt our shelter was in mass chaos like some of the other shelters because things were really under control. The health department teams came through on a four-day rotation. I would say Team 1 was for setup, Team 2 was for patient coordination, Team 3 was for fine tuning paperwork, and Team 4 was for tying up ends and closing down.”

As a leader in the effort to make the shelter a success, Ms. Freeman was pleased with the outcome. “It’s amazing what you would learn, and nice to see where we had come from start to finish,” Ms. Freeman said. She noted that health department staff members were both caring and had good senses of humor, she said. She welcomes anyone who staffed the shelters to make a return visit.

“They had grace under fire and were wonderful to work with,” Ms. Freeman said. “A health department social worker felt so much more needed to be done that she took leave to stay here and work an extra day. You knew she was led by her heart to be here because she was so attached to the people. We felt so blessed to have them here.”

Both she and Dr. Freeman, her family practitioner husband, spent a lot of time in the shelters, sometimes



Volunteer Lisa Freeman and Stacey Neumann

staying as late as 1 or 2 a.m. “On Labor Day we were home just six hours because our adrenaline was still running,” Ms. Freeman said. “We found that more intensive medical care was needed than planned and more staffing was needed.”

## ‘Wonderful’ community of Fairhope

“It’s a very supportive community,” Ms. Freeman said. “We listed our needs on a cork board and an hour later it seemed that whatever was requested would be in hand.” When a man said he didn’t know how best to help, he presented a cash donation of \$2,000. Another person donated an electric wheelchair.

Local people delivered food, drove the shelter occupants to doctors’ appointments, made arrangements for flight connections through the Angel Flight volunteer pilots, helped displaced workers find part-time jobs, and steered one young man to enroll in college. Many families from southern Mississippi and Louisiana have been integrated into the community and their children now attend local schools.

“There were so many selfless acts of love,” Ms. Freeman said.

Seemingly sad cases abound as well, but community members went out of their way to reunite families and help

*Fairhope.....continued on page 5*



*Photo by Robin Cooper*

State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson is shown with Gov. Bob Riley at a satellite news conference on disaster relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina. Another satellite conference was held in conjunction with other agencies. Many media interviews also provided information on health issues related to the events in the aftermath of the hurricane.



Nurse Manager Sherrie Howell of Brookwood Medical Center in Birmingham discusses her experiences with reporters. She cared for patients who had been transported from hospitals in the Katrina-affected areas and represented Alabama hospitals at a news conference on Sept. 7.



Staff packed the equipment the response teams needed in leased vans bound for shelters in the affected areas. Pictured after sending a team off are Gene Hill, computer Systems Center; Leon Barwick, Bureau of Information Services director; Ed Sutton, CSC; Mark McLendon, CSC; Shenell Fuller, Center for Emergency Preparedness; and Jessica Hardy, Professional and Support Services.

## Fairhope.....continued from page 4

others find their way. To help one family reunite, an emergency medical technician spent hours tracking down a family who had been separated through no fault of their own. Two of the young men in the family had been hospitalized in different cities.

“Some days you’d laugh and cry very hard,” Ms. Freeman said. “You walked away very thankful, and your own problems were insignificant at the moment.”

The caretaker of a man with Parkinson’s Disease left him alone to fend for himself. Now, with help from people in the shelter, he has been placed in an Alabama nursing home. Unfortunately, some relatives who were contacted said they did not want to take care of their displaced family members.

Special needs of the shelter occupants were made known and addressed. An 87-year-old woman whose previous daily routine included playing several hands of

bridge received regular visits from members of the community who came into the shelter to join her at card games.

The shelter experience has resulted in a resolve to be even better prepared for the next disaster by having supplies stored in advance. “It’s amazing what you would learn and nice to see where we would come from start to finish,” she said. “I wish the health department workers who came earlier could have seen the fruits of their labor before the shelter closed.”

Displaced families are still living in Baldwin County and need assistance, Ms. Freeman said. The Transitional Outreach Ministry of Fairhope United Methodist Church was developed specifically to meet the ongoing needs of evacuees. They are helping locate housing, transportation, long-term recovery and other needs for displaced individuals.

# Team members assist shelter occupants

**P**ublic health mobilized quickly to meet community needs and the needs of Mississippi and Louisiana evacuees in connection with Hurricane Katrina. The following is a list of public health employees and volunteers who were deployed to staff mass care and medical needs shelters, often working under very difficult conditions. Shelters were located in schools, civic and student centers, and hospitals.

The many dedicated employees from public health areas 4, 7, 9 and 11 are not named individually in this listing, but also responded quickly and admirably in carrying out their public health responsibilities.

Mobile County (Area 11) hospitals and clinics worked around the clock for several weeks to handle the medical

needs of many Mississippi and Louisiana evacuees. Mobile County Health Department staff were involved 24 hours per day supporting the efforts of these hospitals, clinics and shelters. Area 7 and 9 emergency preparedness teams and area staff worked around the clock as well to coordinate and support response and relief efforts by hospitals, medical needs shelters and the like. Jefferson County (Area 4) staff assisted in the acceptance and triage of airlifted evacuees into Birmingham and the staffing of shelters.

Michele Williams, director of Planning Resources in the Center for Emergency Preparedness, noted, "This does not even begin to count the numerous individuals who were working in the RSA Tower and at many county health department locations in support of the response."

## AREA/CENTRAL OFFICE EMPLOYEES

Mary S. Alewine  
Deborah E. Baker  
Lori Bell  
Karen Bennefield  
Shelia M. Blackshear  
Sherry Box  
Susan Brewer  
Charles Brookins  
Dana Brown  
Marie Carastro  
Vickie Carter  
Kristi D. Cheek  
Thomasine Choat  
Paige Clark  
Robbie Coffman  
James Congleton  
Marley Crabtree  
Terri Crane  
Russell Crowley  
Thresa Dix  
Tommy Dockery  
Cheryl Dunn  
Jeanie Earnest  
Annette Fagan  
Barbara J. Floyd  
Suzanne Flynn  
Sylvia S. Foreman  
Charlena Freeman  
Mim Gaines  
Tina Galloway  
Sherry Goode  
Carolyn Griggs  
DiAnne Hamilton  
Dollie Hambrick  
Gene Hamrick

Dawn Harris  
Russell Harry  
Bernadette B. Harville  
Tim Hatch  
Leslie W. Hay  
Mark Hendrix  
M.J. Hollingsworth  
Ross Hudson  
Rosemary Humber  
Mark Jackson  
Cynthia Jewell  
Mark Johnson  
Ted Johnson  
Karen Jurls  
Beth Kimbrell  
Corey Kirkland  
Cindy Lawford  
Patty Leonard  
McLinda M. Lewis  
Michael G. Likos  
Jim Lynch  
Angela McCray  
Gene Malkoff  
Pauline Mallard  
Liz McGraw  
Martha Medders  
Jamie Medley  
Anthony Merriweather  
Beverly Morgan  
Andy Mullins  
Sondra Nassetta  
Stacey E. Neumann  
Beverly L. Owens  
Mariam Pack  
Elana M. Parker

Brenda Parton  
Sherri L. Poole  
Lesia Roddam  
Eileen Rogers  
Sonja P. Rogers  
Dell Ross  
Larry Rush  
Ronnie Russell  
Sherry Ryals  
Tanga St. John  
Sallie Shipman  
Gwynne Simmons  
Carter Sims  
Judy Smith  
Lesa C. Smith  
Abby Snead  
Sherri Stabler  
Brenda Stowe  
Terri Taylor  
Carolyn Thomas  
Jora D. Thomas  
Lani Thompson  
Telitha J. Thrasher  
Liz Todd  
Melody K. Tompkins  
Shelia Underwood  
Brenda Valentine  
Debbie Wetzell  
Queen Whitfield  
Peggy Willett  
Janice R. Wittscheck  
Patricia Woods  
Sherry Young

## VOLUNTEERS

Hannah Baker  
Ann Bales  
Drue Bennett  
Doreen Bock  
Sara Cheri Brooker  
Melissa Carter  
Molly R. Coker  
Sandra Dodson  
Jennifer Dunne  
Janette Duzick  
Vivian Gillespie  
Linda Goforth  
Kathleen Graham  
Jacquelyn Hall  
James Hatchett  
Kristine Hicks  
Tracy Hodges  
Karen C. Lake  
Vesta Lancaster  
Chris Lester  
Nancy McLaney  
Dr. Ryan Nash  
Valerie Ann Padd  
Jeremy Pfeil  
Michelle Schutts  
Cynthia Serna  
Kelly Findley Shablow  
Marion Louise Stewart

# Commendations

**H**ealth department employees who are listed here have received letters of commendation recently. To recognize other employees, please send letters through your supervisors or the state health officer to *Alabama's Health*.

***Catrinna Barber***  
Center for Health Statistics

from Reuben Felix  
Address unlisted

***Linda Bolding***  
Center for Health Statistics

from Ina Ruth Bronson  
Apopka, Fla.  
Mildred Sutter  
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.  
Bernard Traylor  
Chesapeake, Va,

***Camilla English***  
Baldwin County Health Department  
  
from Renae Carpenter, L.C.S.W.  
Grove Hill, Ala.

***Veronica Moore-Whitfield***  
Center for Health Statistics

from James E Brown  
Houston, Texas

***Georgia Reynolds***  
Center for Health Statistics

from Christine Bowles  
Louisville, Ky.

***Anetha D. Robinson***  
Health Provider Standards

from Frank Holden  
Montgomery, Ala.

***Kim Smith***  
Center for Health Statistics

from Jennifer Valentin  
Madison, Ala.  
Allen Keith Rogers  
Rohnert Park, Calif.  
Kathy Westmoreland  
Louisville, Ky.

# Retirees

**T**he following employees have retired recently from the Alabama Department of Public Health:

## September -

***Susan Albertolli*** - Escambia County Health Department  
***Betsy Blume*** - Lauderdale County Health Department  
***Bessie Brown*** - Center for Health Statistics  
***William Duke*** - Center for Health Statistics  
***Elmer Huff*** - Finance  
***Rose Lawley*** - CHIP  
***Patricia Maddox*** - Public Health Area I  
***Delores Martin*** - Coffee County Health Department  
***Alice Martinez*** - Madison County Health Department

***Mamie Norris*** - Bureau of Family Health Services  
***Regina Rosser*** - Blount County Health Department

## October -

***Caroline Brummitte*** - Public Health Area V  
***Marty Worthy*** - Public Health Area VI



# Covering Alabama Kids and Families promotes health care for back to school

**C**overing Alabama Kids and Families, a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative (administered by the Alabama Department of Public Health Children's Health Insurance Program), joined with county health departments to promote the need for children's health insurance coverage as an important back-to-school message for parents.

Identifying and enrolling eligible but uninsured families is a goal of the program, and planners thought when parents were purchasing back-to-school items for their children, a back-to-school health care checklist would be helpful as well. The back-to-school checklists were prepared and made available at businesses where school supplies are sold.

A Mobile County Health Department news release asked parents to "Put your child's health at the top of your back-to-school list." This promotion was used to encourage parents to enroll in the low-cost or free health care coverage provided through Medicaid, ALL Kids and the Alabama Child Caring Program. ALL Kids representatives were present to assist with questions or applications at two recent Mobile Bay Bears games. Children were given colorful umbrellas as a promotional incentive.

In Colbert, Franklin and Lauderdale counties in Northwest Alabama, efforts were made in conjunction with the "Give a Kid a Chance" outreach ministry to assist students with obtaining necessary school supplies at no cost.

Other activities included outreach at immunization events provided at health fairs, churches, medical centers and businesses. In partnership with the Birmingham City Schools, an outreach and enrollment session was held at the Lights On After-school events.

Information about other events around the state can be found at [Coveringkidsandfamilies.org](http://Coveringkidsandfamilies.org). Click on the state of Alabama for state information.

ALL Kids offers low-cost healthcare coverage for children and teens under age 19. Families may call *ALL Kids* at 1-888-373-KIDS(5437) for an application or apply on-line at [www.adph.org/allkids](http://www.adph.org/allkids). There is no waiting list for ALL Kids.



Check lists and promotions encouraged parents to make children's health a priority.

## Talk show guests promote health issues

**E**ach month dedicated staff appear on WAKA's Midday News program's health segment in Montgomery to discuss relevant health issues and to answer calls from the public. To show our appreciation, *Alabama's Health* would like to recognize these staff members who take the time to participate in this valuable service.

August's guest was Brooke Thorington, public information coordinator and Quitline Coordinator for the Tobacco Prevention and Control Division. Ms. Thorington spoke about the Quitline program, a statewide toll-free number offering counseling to all Alabamians who need assistance quitting cigarettes and chewing tobacco, as well as providing self-help materials, referrals to local programs and discount coupons for nicotine replacement products.

September's guest was Linda Austin, director of the Arthritis Prevention Branch. Ms. Austin spoke about the annual Arthritis Coalition meeting and other relevant arthritis issues.

If you would like to appear on WAKA's Midday News program, please contact Takenya Stokes at 334-206-7026, or by e-mail at [tstokes@adph.state.al.us](mailto:tstokes@adph.state.al.us).

**TOBACCO QUITLINE:** The 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) phone number offers counseling services Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m.



# 'Reporters Diet' leads to dramatic, sustained weight loss

**W**hen Lora Burton began work as an administrative support assistant in the Computer Systems Center three years ago, she wore a size 26 and weighed 254 pounds, which actually was down from her all-time high weight of 270 pounds. But without undergoing surgery or taking diet medications, she now wears a size 8. This change comes after two and one-half years of effort and participation in the department's Food and Fitness Program.

Ms. Burton said she no longer considers the four food groups to be sugars, starches, fats and carbohydrates washed down with sugared pop. Her plate is no longer brown and white but is a rainbow of colors. Now she has a healthier eating pattern and drinks milk, orange juice and Crystal Lite tea. She has lost 121 pounds in the past 31 months by participating in Food and Fitness.

"I'm on what I call a 'reporters diet' and I record the five W's: what, when, where, how and why I eat." On a typical day she might eat a boiled egg en route to work, then a six-inch Subway sandwich for lunch, maybe supplemented with a small granola bar or sunflower seeds as snacks. Dinner usually consists of either a large spinach salad made into a chef-type salad with tuna or eggs, or roast beef with potatoes and carrots. Her food preferences have changed greatly.

Mim Gaines, director of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Unit, has worked closely with Ms. Burton, regularly meeting with her and counseling her about her food choices. Over time a mutual respect has developed and grown.

"Mim was my real cheerleader," Ms. Burton said. "People have really noticed that I've lost weight and have commented on it."

Ms. Gaines commented, "She's made so many lifestyle changes. It's a choice you have to make." Among the choices Ms. Burton has made are no longer eating from containers, no longer taking naps or reclining after eating, and having a place to eat portion-controlled foods. Formerly, she hit the drive-through restaurants regularly, and now she rarely does. Most importantly, Ms. Gaines said, "Lora's entire attitude has changed from confessing about the bad food she had eaten to displaying excitement about trying new healthful dishes."

Even her car looks different now with lots of water bottles instead of packs of food everywhere. Her desk, her kitchen cabinets and her refrigerator all look different. In fact, after power losses during Hurricane Ivan she simply

didn't buy the less healthful food items.

Ms. Gaines explained that obesity is defined with a body mass index, BMI, of 30. There is an "Obese Class I," an "Obese Class II" and "Extreme Obesity." Even though Ms. Burton is a very private person, she doesn't mind saying that her BMI has dropped from the top of the obesity II category (her BMI was 39) to now the appropriate body weight category of less than 25 and her waist measurement has dropped from 46 down to 31 1/2 inches!

"At times it was painstaking and hard, but Mim has earned my trust and respect, which I don't hand out freely," Ms. Burton said. "I confide in her, and she's done well with it."

Ms. Gaines said, "She never gave up. She has been on plateaus, but she did not give up the desire for health and her need to feel good. It wasn't a surface value. She's a good role model for determination."

Now she has a brighter outlook, more energy, greater stamina, knees that don't hurt and her overall physical health is better.

Central office employees who are interested in participating in the Food and Fitness Program should contact the Nutrition and Physical Activity Unit at 206-5226 or e-mail her directly at [mgaines@adph.state.al.us](mailto:mgaines@adph.state.al.us) for more information.



BEFORE



AFTER

## Use candles with care

**T**he use of decorative candles is a growing concern as more people are being injured or killed in home fires caused by candles. To address this issue, "Use Candles with Care," has been designated as the theme this year by the National Fire Protection Association for Fire Prevention Week, Oct. 9-15, 2005.

Since 2000, the Alabama State Fire Marshal's Office has recorded 13 deaths from fire in the state due to the improper use of candles. The incidence of fires started in the home by candles has been increasing nationally since 1995. The latest data provided by the association indicated a 15 percent increase in candle fires from 2000-2001.

"Candle-related home fires are a growing concern as the use of candles is increasing, whether it's for decoration or as a light source during power outages. But, many people might not be aware of how dangerous the improper use of candles can be," said Amanda Calhoun, fire safety educator with the Alabama Department of Public Health.

Factors contributing to candle-causing fires include the following:

- \* Leaving lit candles unattended or near combustible materials
- \* Using candles as a light source
- \* Leaving children alone in rooms with lit candles

As the incidence of candle fires increases, so does the risk for people to be killed or injured. According to a 2001 NFPA survey, an estimated 190 people were killed in home fires started by candles. This survey also estimates that for every person killed, approximately eight people are injured. Those at greatest risk to suffer from death or injury include young children and families living in poverty.

Fires are most commonly caused by placing candles

too close to combustible sources such as mattresses or bedding. Most fires caused by candles originate in the bedroom, often while people are sleeping. However, fires that were started in a living room or common area resulted in more deaths.

Here are some tips on how to use candles safely in the home:

- \* Extinguish all candles before leaving a room or going to sleep.
- \* Keep lit candles away from combustible items such as clothing, paper, bedding, window curtains and holiday decorations.
- \* Use candle holders that are sturdy and large enough to collect dripping wax.
- \* Store candles, matches and lighters out of the sight and reach of young children.
- \* Place candles up high enough to prevent them from accidentally being knocked over by young children and pets.

For more information on fire prevention, please visit the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site at [www.adph.org/injuryprevention](http://www.adph.org/injuryprevention).

*By AMANDA CALHOUN, M.S.P.H.*

### **Injury News**

Published By

The Alabama Department of Public Health

Injury Prevention Division

Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease

Carol F. Mysinger, M.Ed., M.P.A.....Director

Funded by a grant from the Law Enforcement and Traffic Safety Division, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

# Rivals on the Football Field Unite

**M**urphy and Bryant High School students may be competing on the football field this week, but many of their students are united in a mission as important as a state title. Nearly a hundred students at these schools are members of the MCPSS SWAT Project (Students Working Against Tobacco) and are joined by members at B.C. Rain and Grand Bay Middle School.

Aware that 12,000 Alabama kids under 18 become regular smokers each year, the students are driven by a desire to protect young people from addiction and tobacco-related disease and death. Working as peer educators in MCP schools, they present information specially designed to impress younger kids that tobacco use is not cool, is extremely dangerous to their health and quality of life, and affects the whole community. "We want adults and children to understand that tobacco use is serious. It is harmful and costs us all," says Eric Horn, Murphy SWAT member.

The SWAT students are also involved in a community wide education campaign 53K! designed to inform people of the REAL dangers of secondhand smoke. 1,210 Alabama babies, children, adolescents and adults will die this year from other people's tobacco smoke. That is more deaths than alcohol, illegal drugs, homicide, car accidents and AIDS combined.

Secondhand smoke is by far the most dangerous air pollutant most Americans ever encounter. It is a toxic mixture consisting of over 4,000 chemical compounds; 200 of which are known to be poisonous and 60 have been identified as carcinogens, known to cause cancer in humans. "The secondhand smoker's body is affected by these chemicals just like the smoker's," said Kristen Creal, Bryant SWAT member. "A short 30-minute exposure to secondhand smoke in a restaurant affects my heart and lungs just like smoking would."

By eliminating our exposure to secondhand smoke in public places we can reduce the incidence of cancer, heart disease, asthma, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or SIDS and many other respiratory conditions. Bayleigh Murray a Bryant High School SWAT member said it best, "Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of secondhand smoke and often powerless to protect themselves."

According to the National Center for Tobacco Free Kids, each year 289,000 Alabama kids are exposed to secondhand smoke in homes, cars and other public places.

This exposure increases the chances that the children will suffer from smoke-caused coughs and wheezing, bronchitis, asthma, pneumonia, potentially fatal lower respiratory tract infections, eye and ear problems and other health problems."

"Our message is simple," stated Jermaine Mitchell, "If you smoke or are around someone who smokes you are shortening your life. Secondhand smoke may not kill as many people as smoking, but it is still a first rate killer."

SWAT students want to encourage local lawmakers to support laws that ban smoking in all public places.

The mission of the Coalition for a Tobacco-Free Mobile and Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) is to prevent youth from using tobacco. For more information about SWAT and its efforts, contact Tobacco Free Mobile at (251) 690-8824 or the Mobile County Health Department at (251) 690-8818. Say no to smoking and yes to a healthier quality of life!

*By STEPHANIE WOODS, PIO  
MOBILE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT*



SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco) students support laws banning tobacco in public places.

# Calendar of Events



**October 18**

Diabetes: The Basics—Understanding and Managing Diabetes: Self-testing, Diabetes and Medication (part 1 of 3), 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Video Communications Division, (334) 206-5618.



**October 19**

Understanding Depression in the Elderly, 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Brenda Elliott, (334) 347-2664 ext. 402.



**October 20**

Assessing Systemic Impact of Disaster and Terrorism, 12 noon-1:30 p.m. For more information contact Video Communications Division, (334) 206-5618.



**October 25**

Response Worker Health and Safety in a Post-Katrina World, 12 -1:30 p.m. For more information contact Video Communications Division, (334) 206-5618.



**November 1**

Diabetes Education (part 2 of 3), 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Video Communications Division, (334) 206-5618.



**November 3**

ADPH Statewide Staff Meeting, 3-4 p.m. For more information contact Jim McVay, Dr.P.A., (334) 206-5600.



**November 8**

Diabetes and Complications (part 3 of 3), 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Video Communications Division, (334) 206-5618.



**November 10**

Components of Family Planning Chart Review: Would Your Chart Stand Up to Scrutiny? (part 3 of 3), 2- 4 p.m. For more information contact Video Communications Division, (334) 206-5618.

**May 3-5**

50th Annual Alabama Public Health Association Health Education Conference, Radisson Hotel, Birmingham.



