

TOXIC POLLUTION

WE HAVE A PROBLEM:

- More than 4 billion pounds of toxic chemicals are released into the air and water in the U.S. each year.¹
- Some chemicals, such as chlorine gas, can kill instantly, others can cause cancer, birth defects and infertility.
- Approximately 100,00 new chemicals are being used each year, most of which are not fully tested for their effects on human health.²
- Toxic chemicals can be released from a product at any stage of its life cycle, during its manufacture, use or disposal.³

SOLUTION:

- Dangerous chemicals should be replaced by safer substitutes.
- Manufacturers must take responsibility for the disposal of their products.
- All chemicals should be fully tested before they are allowed on the market

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Tell Congress to pass legislation that requires the substitution of dangerous chemicals with safer alternatives.
- Buy only from companies that make clean products; for example, many companies have eliminated vinyl (PVC) from their products and packaging.
- Contact companies and demand to know what chemicals are used in their products.

“We conclude that persistent toxic substances are too dangerous to the biosphere and to humans to permit their release in any quantity.”

International Joint Commission (U.S. and Canada),
Biennial Report on Great Lakes Water Quality, 1992



TAKE ACTION TO STOP TOXICS

The Issue

From children's toys to laptop computers, and from sewage plants to home construction, modern industry uses toxic chemicals like there was no tomorrow. Frequently, these poisons, including heavy metals, noxious gases and carcinogens, are released into the environment, sometimes as products are put to their intended use and sometimes once they are discarded as waste. Yet we barely understand the long-term damage we are doing to ourselves and the planet; in the overwhelming majority of cases, comprehensive testing of health effects is not required before a toxic substance is put on the market. Factory workers and nearby communities are the first to be exposed but virtually every person on the planet, including babies still in the womb, has some combination of synthetic poisons present in their bodies. Many forms of cancer, birth defects, and reproductive health problems have been linked to exposure to toxic chemicals.

The Solution

Most of these toxic compounds can be replaced by safer, cleaner alternatives. In 2001, for example, Cargill opened a \$300 million plant in Nebraska that produces chlorine-free plastics out of vegetable matter. Following the 9/11 attacks, the Blue Plains sewage treatment plant in Washington D.C. switched from chlorine to safer chemicals in just eight weeks. The cost was estimated at less than 50c per customer per year. Given the availability of safer alternatives, there is no excuse for industry to continue poisoning people and the planet.

The Opposition

Rather than improve safety and security, the chemical industry and the Bush administration are trying to weaken existing protections in the U.S.⁴ As if that wasn't enough, they have even sought to block the European Union's efforts to require full testing of all chemicals used in consumer products before they are placed on the market. For the health of the public and the planet, the chemical lobby's influence inside the beltway needs to be curbed.

What You Can Do

SEND A MESSAGE: Call Congress at 202 224-3121 and demand that they enact legislation that requires the substitution of dangerous chemicals with safer alternatives.

LOOK FOR: Products from companies that don't use toxics; for example, many manufacturers have eliminated vinyl (PVC) from their products and packaging. Contact manufacturers and demand to know what chemicals they are using in products.

GET INVOLVED: On campus or online at:
www.greenpeaceusa.org/getinvolved

Greenpeace Victories

- In 2005, the European Union bans dangerous chemicals from toys for small children.
- In 2001, over 120 countries sign the Stockholm Treaty phasing out 12 persistent organic pollutants (POPs) such as dioxin, PCBs and DDT.
- In 1993, the U.S. EPA stops the expansion of incineration of toxic waste.
- In 1989, the Basel Convention bans the shipping of hazardous chemicals to developing nations.

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