

Fertile Ground: Reproductive Health and National Chemical Policy Reform

On a day to day basis, our families and loved ones are exposed to a host of harmful or untested chemicals. Many of these chemicals are found in everyday items like water and baby bottles, food containers, vinyl shower curtains, and a number of household cleaners. The negative reproductive health impact of these chemicals can include: infertility, cancer, endometriosis, early puberty, miscarriage and poor birth outcomes.¹⁻⁷ Although there are a number of simple solutions to protect yourself and your family, it is important to understand why these harmful chemicals persist in our everyday products.

What does our chemical policy look like now?

- The law governing the manufacture and use of chemicals in the United States is extremely outdated. In fact, the law, known as the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), has not changed in 34 years. Under this law, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has little ability to oversee the safety of chemicals or hold manufacturers accountable for testing the chemicals they use in products. As a result, many of the chemicals used in our everyday products have not been tested for safety, but continue to remain on the market.

What needs to be done?

- To improve inadequate chemical regulation, we need strong national chemical policy reform that is multi-pronged and comprehensive. Although the chemical-by-chemical bans currently in place are a step in the right direction, most chemicals in consumer products are not tested for safety and adverse effects on human health.

- Reform of TSCA will need to encompass these [essential changes](#):

- Require manufacturers to provide basic information for all chemicals used in products.
- Hold industry responsible for demonstrating the safety of the chemicals used in each product.
- Reduce the disproportionate chemical exposure to people of color, low income and indigenous communities.
- Protect the most vulnerable, including children, workers, and pregnant women.
- Enhance the coordination and communication between the EPA and other government agencies.
- Promote safer alternatives to harmful chemicals.
- Make information about the effects of chemicals on human and environmental health publicly available.
- Immediately begin phasing out the most hazardous chemicals on the market.
- Adopt the best science and methods to test and assess the risk of chemicals.

“It’s obvious. We need to protect our health. We already have enough stress and other stuff to deal with, we don’t need to worry about toxics in our lives too. There are so many different products out there, it’s hard to tell which ones are safe to use and which are not. We need a way of knowing which are safe and which aren’t.”

Casey Branthoover
College Student and Future Environmental Scientist*

Here are three easy steps to advocate for chemical policy reform:

- 1) Give your constituents/members simple solutions to help protect themselves, their families and their communities. For example, link to websites such as www.healthystuff.org or www.goodguide.org.
- 2) Ask Members of Congress to co-sponsor and strengthen the Safe Chemicals Act: www.saferchemicals.org.
- 3) Join RHTP and thousands of others in the Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families (SCHF) campaign to ensure lasting change: <http://saferchemicals.org/join/organization.html> and become a SCHF fan on Facebook. Follow RHTP on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/RHTPOrg>.

- ¹The Endocrine Disruptor Exchange. Endocrine Disruption-Introduction. Accessed on 2009 August 3 at www.endocrinedisruption.com.
- ²Collaborative on Health and the Environment. Girl, Disrupted-Hormone Disruptors and Women's Reproductive Health. Report. Commonweal; 2009 Jan. Accessed 2009 August 3 at <http://www.healthandenvironment.org/articles/doc/5492>.
- ³Breast Cancer Fund. State of the Evidence-The Connection Between Breast Cancer and the Environment. 5th ed. Report. Breast Cancer Fund; 2008. Accessed on 2009 August 3 at <http://www.fertstert.org/article/S0015-0282%2808%2903555->
- ⁴Crain AD et al. Female reproductive disorders: the roles of endocrine- disrupting compounds and developmental timing. *Fert and Ster* 2008; 90(4): 911-940. Accessed on 2009 August 3 at <http://www.fertstert.org/article/S0015-0282%2808%2903555-3/abstract>.
- ⁵Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment. Shaping Our Legacy: Reproductive Health and the Environment. Report. University of California-San Francisco; 2008 Sept. Accessed on 2009 August 3 at <http://www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/pubs/shapingourlegacy.html>.
- ⁶Steingraber S. The Falling Age of Puberty in U.S. Girls: What We Know, What We Need to Know. Breast Cancer Fund; 2007 Aug. Accessed on 2009 August 3 at <http://www.breastcancerfund.org/atf/cf/%7BDE68F7B2-5F6A-4B57-9794-AFE5D27A3CF%7D/The%20Falling%20Age%20of%20Puberty%20report.pdf>.
- ⁷Woodruff T, Carlson A, Schwartz J, Giudice L. Proceedings of the *Summit on Environmental Challenges to Reproductive Health and Fertility*: executive summary. *Fert and Ster* 2008; 89(2): 281-300. Accessed on 2009 August 3 at <http://www.fertstert.org/article/S0015-0282%2807%2903766-1/abstract>.
- ⁸Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families. Accessed on 2009 December 22 at <http://stories.saferchemicals.org/>.