

Help Protect Public Health Support Disease-Prevention Initiatives

There is a strong connection between common illnesses and chemicals that contaminate our environment, products and bodies. See our factsheet “What We Know: the Connections between Women’s Health and the Environment” at www.cleanhealthyny.org/resources.html for more information.

Toxic and untested chemicals end up in our products, environment and bodies because the laws that should manage the use of chemicals are woefully inadequate. For example, the Toxic Substance Control Act (TSCA), passed in 1976, is intended to enable the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to take action on chemicals that are harmful to human health and the environment. However, under TSCA, of the 80,000 chemicals now in use, 60,000 will never be tested because they were ‘grandfathered in’ and assumed safe when the law passed. Only about 200 chemicals have been fully tested for their impacts on health. Furthermore, EPA has only been able to remove five chemicals or chemical classes from commerce – and none since they were defeated in their efforts to ban asbestos in 1991.

“If a disease is made by human beings, we can prevent it.”

– Dr. Philip Landrigan,
Director of the Center for Children’s
Health and the Environment,
Mt. Sinai School of Medicine

Nurses are trusted, credible spokespeople on a range of public health issues, including environmental health, and see first-hand the effects that toxic chemicals can have on the health of their patients. You can have a tremendous impact when educating your patients, other caregivers, and policy makers.

**You can speak out in support of new laws that help prevent disease
by strengthening control of toxic chemicals!**

At the State Level:



Support the NYS Child-Safe Products Act.

To model the kind of change we need at the federal level, New York State must stop addressing one chemical at a time (like passing the recent law to restrict the hormone-disrupting chemical Bisphenol A in baby bottles, sippy cups and pacifiers, or phasing out the use of the toxic heavy metal lead in automobile wheel weights) and take a broader approach. The Child Safe Products Act creates a framework for identifying and prioritizing chemicals that threaten our health, gathering information on chemical use, and phasing out priority chemicals in children’s apparel and novelty products.

Support the Pollution Prevention Institute and the Interstate Chemicals Clearinghouse.

The NYS Pollution Prevention Institute (P2I), based at the Rochester Institute of Technology, has a mandate to help New York companies reduce their reliance on toxic chemicals. In doing so, the P2I improves NY’s environment, health and economy. Each year, despite tight economic times, New York State must include funding for this critical institution.

The Interstate Chemicals Clearinghouse (IC2) connects the efforts of more than 10 states to leverage each state’s work to reduce the use and sale of toxic chemicals. Agency staff members share information, collaboratively manage data, and share strategies for implementation of chemical management laws like the one we support (see above). The IC2 relies on contributions from each participating state. New York must continue to engage in and contribute funds toward this collaborative effort.

At the Federal Level:

Support the Safe Chemicals Act

The Federal Government should fix the broken chemical management system by reforming the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). The U.S. Senate has introduced legislation we would like to see strengthened, known as the Safe Chemicals Act. Important components include:

- **The chemical industry must prove that their chemicals are safe.** Both existing and new chemicals should meet a health-based safety standard in order to stay on or enter the market – which is required by other laws for pharmaceuticals and pesticides.
- **Taking immediate action on the worst chemicals.** EPA must immediately reduce exposure to the greatest extent for toxic chemicals that are PBTs (Persistent, Bioaccumulative, and Toxic), which persist in the environment and build up in the food chain, including lead, mercury, and many halogenated compounds.
- **The safety standard must protect the most vulnerable among us.** Toxic chemicals especially threaten the health of the developing fetus, babies, children, and teens. Other uniquely vulnerable groups include the elderly, people with preexisting medical conditions, workers, and low-income communities of color.
- **EPA must consider cumulative impact and exposure across chemical life cycles** in making safety determinations. EPA must take into account multiple exposures to different chemicals with similar adverse effects, and all chemical sources must be factored in, including industrial facilities, consumer products and waste disposal.



Support the Safe Cosmetics Act

In response to growing concern about unsafe chemicals in our cosmetics and personal care products, lawmakers introduced the Safe Cosmetics Act. This legislation will overhaul the federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act – the law governing the FDA Office of Cosmetics and Colors – giving this office the authority and resources it needs to ensure that cosmetics do not contain harmful ingredients. The Safe Cosmetics Act would require safety assessment of all cosmetics ingredients using a health-based standard that includes protections for vulnerable populations; phase out of cosmetic ingredients linked to cancer, birth defects and developmental harm; and ensure the long-term health of the cosmetics industry by shifting the industry away from toxic chemicals and spurring the innovation of safer products that the world market is demanding.

Support Chemical Plant Security

We must ensure the use of safer, cost-effective technologies at chemical plants. Many chemical plants rely solely on conventional security methods - guards, gates and fences - to keep our families safe. Chemical plants should adopt safer processes and reduce the use of highly toxic and dangerous chemicals. This could protect workers and communities and prevent catastrophic damage in the event of an accident or attack.

Your voice makes a difference, make sure it is heard!

For more information or to get more involved, contact Kathy Curtis, LPN, Policy Director for Clean New York at (518) 708-3922 or kathy@cleanhealthyny.org or Thomas Lowe, RN, MPH, COHN-S, Occupational & Environmental Health Representative at New York State Nurses Association and JustGreen Partnership Steering Committee Member at (212) 785-0157 x200 or thomas.lowe@nysna.org.