

***Citizens' Environmental Coalition
Learning Disabilities Association of NYS***

NEWS RELEASE

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Groundbreaking Report Finds Hazardous Chemicals in Household Dust Across U.S.

***Environmental Health Advocates Call upon Governor to
Convene NY Flame Retardant Taskforce***

***Abundance of Toxic Chemicals Leach from Electronics,
Shower Curtains, Vinyl Flooring and Other Common Household Products
Causing Unnecessary Health Risks***

(Albany, NY) A national study released today found 35 hazardous chemicals in dust samples taken from 70 homes in seven states, including ten in the Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and New York City areas. The study -- ***Sick of Dust: Chemicals in Common Products - a Needless Health Threat in Our Homes*** – is the first in the U.S. to look at a new and wide range of chemicals commonly found in computers, cosmetics, upholstery, pesticides and other consumer products. All of these chemicals are legal, despite being internationally recognized as toxic or harmful to the immune and reproductive systems. Babies and young children are particularly at risk from exposure.

Sick of Dust outlines all of the major chemicals found in the dust samples, their health risks, and the products in which they are found. The report also ranks companies on their use of hazardous chemicals and reveals fundamental changes needed to reform American chemical regulation to protect our basic health and that of future generations. [For a copy of the full report please visit www.safer-products.org](http://www.safer-products.org).

“Our homes should be safe sanctuaries for our families, not the repository for the chemical industry’s poisons,” said Kathy Curtis, Executive Director of Citizens’ Environmental Coalition. “It is clear that chemical laws have failed us and our kids when everyday products fill our homes and our bodies with a toxic cocktail we can’t avoid. Our lawmakers need to step in and fill this huge gap in safeguards.”

“It was a great opportunity to participate in this study that will hopefully lead to less indoor environmental pollutants and healthier families throughout New York,” said Assemblyman David Koon, dust study participant.

Environmental health advocates in NY are calling on the Governor to fully implement the brominated flame retardant phase out bill passed by the NY legislature last year. The law also mandates the creation of a state task force on flame retardant safety, which, seven months after the law’s passage, has yet to be convened.

"Our society has become too dependent upon chemicals added to household products, and now we are finding they don't just stay in the products but escape into our living space and into our bodies," noted Dr. David Carpenter, Director of the Institute for Health and the Environment at SUNYA School of Public Health. "We know that many of these substances are toxic to people, especially to children, and none of them are good for our health," Carpenter added.

Over the past year, in addition to the toxic flame retardant ban, a number of key policies in New York shift the market away from hazardous chemicals and toward safer substitutes in consumer products. In 2004, the NY Assembly and Senate both passed legislation restricting the use of PVC and other plastic piping in NYS, building off of a similar restriction passed a few years ago. Despite broad bipartisan legislative support, the Governor vetoed this legislation after coming under intense pressure from the chemical industry.

In December 2004 the City of Buffalo became the first in NY to pass legislation phasing out the purchase of products that contain or contribute to persistent bioaccumulative toxic chemicals (PBTs) such as toxic flame retardants, mercury, and dioxin.

Legislation is currently pending before the NY Assembly, which would protect children by banning the cancer causing pesticide lindane for treating lice and scabies. Non-toxic treatments are readily available, and are cost- and performance-effective. The bill is currently languishing in the Assembly Health Committee.

"This report is an eye opener for those of us who thought that at least our homes were free of harmful chemicals," noted Heather Loukmas, Executive Director of the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State. "As consumers, especially those with small children at home, we need to be much more vigilant when buying products. And, as purchasers of these products, we need to begin demanding accountability from companies that produce and use chemicals that are known to have harmful health effects," Loukmas added.

The *Sick of Dust* report found six main types of chemicals in people's homes. All composite samples were contaminated by all six of the following chemical classes:

- 1) Alkylphenols** – Found in laundry detergents, textiles, hair-coloring, paints and all-purpose cleaners. These chemicals are widely recognized to mimic natural estrogen hormones leading to altered sexual development in some organisms.
- 2) Organotin Compounds** – Found in PVC (polyvinyl chloride) water pipes, PVC food packing materials, glass coatings, polyurethane foams, and many other consumer products. These chemicals are very poisonous even in small amounts. They can disrupt the hormone, reproductive and immune systems. Animal studies show that exposure early in life can also have long-term effects on brain development.
- 3) Perfluorinated Organics** – Used to make Teflon, Goretex and other oil-, water- and stain-resistant materials for nonstick frying pans, utensils, stove hoods, stain-proof carpets, furniture and clothes. These chemicals have been shown to damage organ function and sexual development in lab animals, and are potentially carcinogenic.
- 4) Pesticides** – Applied in and around homes for controlling infestations of various insects and used in carpets. Pesticides include a wide range of chemicals. Some are associated with cancer, reproductive effects and birth defects, and many are toxic to the nervous system.
- 5) Phthalates** – Used primarily in vinyl (PVC) products such as shower curtains, raincoats, toys, furniture and flooring. Also used in paint, pesticides and personal care products (perfume, nail polish, hairspray). These chemicals disrupt reproductive systems in animal studies, particularly in male offspring and can contribute to male infertility. They have been linked to asthma and respiratory problems in children.
- 6) Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (Brominated Flame Retardants)** – Applied to textiles or incorporated into plastics, foams and electrical goods to prevent or slow the spread of fire. These chemicals build up in the body and persist for long periods of time in the environment. Studies show they damage the development of the nervous and behavioral systems in young animals. American women have the highest levels of these chemicals tested for in breast milk.

"We all absolutely must become more aware of the contents of the products we buy and of how those contents can affect the health of everyone in our households, especially our children and pets who are nearer to the ground, where dust settles," said Joy Zimmerlin, dust study participant. "From now on, I definitely will think about it!"

“As a nursing mother, I am outraged that despite my best efforts to protect my baby, the very dust in my home is contaminated. Why take a chance with the lives of our children?” asked Bobbi Chase, dust study participant. “Manufacturers and retailers need to stop using toxic chemicals which are building up in our bodies and switch to safer alternatives which are readily available” Chase added.

Exposure to this “toxic cocktail” is unnecessary and avoidable. As a nation we can progress in three primary ways:

1) Chemical Regulation Overhaul –Our current regulations allow the continuing production and use of chemicals in everyday products that are linked to cancer, reproductive and neurological damage. The Federal Government should make such chemicals of high concern a priority for phase out and mandate their immediate substitution with safer chemicals. Meanwhile, state governments in the U.S. are taking action. In Arkansas, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oregon and Washington legislation is underway to phase out some of the most dangerous chemicals. Europe can serve as an example. Home to the largest chemical industry in the world, Europe is currently overhauling its chemicals policy so that highly hazardous chemicals will require special authorization to be produced and used. Regulators believe this will lead to many highly toxic chemicals dropped from commerce and hasten the adoption of safe chemicals use in products and manufacturing processes.

2) Corporate Responsibility -- Companies such as Dell, IKEA, Herman Miller and Shaw Carpets are examples of how companies can use safer chemicals in their product lines. Innovation is both feasible and profitable and other companies need to set similar goals and get active.

3) Consumer Action -- As a consumer, pay attention to the products you buy and find out if the brand name company you buy from is working toward a safe chemicals policy. Try to avoid items made with vinyl (PVC), brominated flame retardants and other harmful chemicals. See www.safer-products.org for more information including our company ranking on chemicals used in products.

Citizens’ Environmental Coalition is a statewide grassroots environmental organization of 110 groups and 14,000 individuals working to eliminate pollution and protect human health and the environment in NY by serving as the nexus of local communities, state-level policy discussions and national collaborations.

The Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) of NYS is a parent-driven statewide organization providing advocacy and support services to individuals with learning disabilities, neurological impairments, and other related developmental disabilities as well as providing support services to their families. LDA is an alliance comprised of 8 Regional Chapters that provide services to over 10,000 people per year. LDA of NYS is affiliated with LDA of America.

For more information, including a full copy of the report and background materials, visit www.cectoxic.org and www.safer-products.org. The new study, *Sick of Dust: Chemicals in Common Products a Needless Health Risk in Our Homes*, was coordinated and produced by Clean Production Action through their Safer Products Project with the help of environmental health organizations in seven states.