

***Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides
Citizens' Environmental Coalition
New York Public Interest Research Group***

NEWS RELEASE

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High Levels of Toxic Lead Found in Children's Jewelry Sold at Rochester Retailers

***Bill to Ban the Sale of Lead-Tainted Jewelry Introduced by Assemblyman Koon and
Senator Alesi***

(Rochester, NY) Leading environmental health advocates today released new test results which found alarmingly high levels of lead in children's jewelry sold at various Rochester retailers. Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides collected random samples of children's jewelry from Big Lots, Eckerd's, and Wegman's and sent them to a lab for analysis in April. The tests revealed concentrations of lead over 60,000 parts per million – over one hundred times the established limit of 600 parts per million, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Assemblyman David Koon (D – Fairport) and Senator James Alesi (R – Perinton) have introduced legislation, A. 7726 / S. 5300, banning the sale and distribution of jewelry containing lead, to reduce children's exposure to this hazard.

“The results of the tests were especially shocking,” said **Judy Braiman, President of Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides**. “Lead is harmful to brain development in fetuses, infants, and young children.”

High concentrations of lead have been consistently found in jewelry, particularly inexpensive jewelry marketed to children sold at drug stores, supermarkets, and discount stores. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has recalled nearly 150 million pieces of toy jewelry containing lead. However, leaded jewelry continues to be sold across the country. A recent study published in the Bulletin of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology found that a majority of bracelets, rings, necklaces and earrings bought from big chain stores leached enough lead to cause minor neurological damage with just 20 seconds of daily contact.

“Children are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of lead and we have worked to reduce lead exposure in homes and schools,” said **Assemblyman David Koon (D – Fairport)**. “By removing lead-tainted jewelry from stores we are further protecting our children from developmental damage. This legislation is critically important as the federal government sidesteps its responsibility to remove these products from the hands of our children.”

No level of lead exposure has been found to be safe for a developing child. Behavioral problems, attention deficit disorders, learning disabilities, mental retardation, anti-social and delinquent behaviors, brain function impairment, and seizures are some of the health effects caused in children exposed to lead. When a pregnant woman has lead in her body, it can cross the placenta and harm a developing child. “Safe” lead levels have been lowered numerous times over the years by the U.S., because recent findings have determined that any exposure to this widespread metal can cause a range of symptoms and possible permanent neurological damage in children.

"This legislation, which prohibits the distribution and sale of jewelry containing lead, is consistent with my efforts to curb the exposure to lead by young people," said **Senator James Alesi (R – Perinton)**. "Also, this proposal will protect the environment from pollutants and poisons. I am grateful for the support of Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides and the Citizens' Environmental Coalition and look forward to partnering with them again in the future. Finally, it must be understood that this bill is part of a comprehensive effort to prevent unnecessary exposure to lead, whether it is found in paint, jewelry or other various materials."

The pending bill prohibits the sale or distribution of jewelry containing more than 600 parts per million of lead after July 1, 2006 and 200 parts per million after January 1, 2008. The legislation also requires the Department of Environmental Conservation to conduct an extensive public information campaign of the hazards of jewelry containing lead. Citizens' Environmental Coalition, the New York Public Interest Research Group, and Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides support the bill. Similar legislation has been introduced in California.

"We applaud Assemblyman Koon and Senator Alesi for introducing this critical legislation that would protect children from toxic lead exposure," said **Michael Schade, Western New York Director of Citizens' Environmental Coalition**. "We urge the NY Assembly and Senate to move swiftly and pass this legislation before the end of the 2005 legislative session. The health and well being of children across New York are at stake."

"We are all responsible for protecting our children from needless exposure to hazardous toxins, which is why we support this legislation from Senator Alesi and Assemblymember Koon," said **Melinda Sobin, regional environmental advocate for NYPIRG**. "We urge the state legislature and Governor Pataki to take action and regulate toxins, like lead and mercury, in the environment and consumer products that can cause irreversible neurological damage in children."

Samples collected in the Rochester area found:

- A charm bracelet sold at Big Lots in East Rochester, NY manufactured by Divine Inspiration had a lead level of 28,100 ppm and a beaded necklace with charms by Way Cool was found to have a lead level of 45,500 ppm.
- A charm bracelet sold at Eckerds in Pittsford, NY manufactured by Twenty-four/seven had a lead level of 61,800 ppm.
- A bracelet sold at Wegmans in Henrietta, NY manufactured by Buffalo Jewel had a lead level of 24,900 ppm and a Friendship Angel pin by Angel of My Heart sold had a lead level of 5,470 ppm.

In response to these alarming results, Big Lots, Eckerds, and Wegmans have taken the tested jewelry off of their shelves, however they may continue to sell other jewelry products containing lead. Citizens' Environmental Coalition and Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides are calling on Big Lots, Eckerds, Wegmans, and other leading retailers to proactively develop and implement a policy to identify and phase out the sale of such products.

Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides is a Rochester-based organization working to protect the public from toxic pesticides. Citizens' Environmental Coalition is a nationally connected NY statewide organization with over 14,000 individual members working to eliminate toxic chemicals from homes, workplaces, schools and communities.

NOTE: Sample results are available to the media upon request.