



The Alliance for a **HEALTHY TOMORROW**

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NEWS RELEASE

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NEW REPORT CALLS FOR ACTION ON TOXIC CLEANING PRODUCTS

Chemicals in Cleaning Products Linked to Asthma and Reproductive Problems

A report released today presents mounting evidence that exposure to chemicals in cleaning products is linked with health problems in people, particularly asthma and reproductive harm.

Household Hazards was released by the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, a Massachusetts coalition of over 150 organizations, including health professionals and labor unions, advocating for safer alternatives to toxic chemicals. The report details specific ingredients in household cleaners that could pose harm – particularly to children, women and workers – and calls for greater regulation of cleaning products sold on store shelves.

“High asthma rates in Massachusetts affect our children’s health and learning. Hazardous cleaning products in our homes, schools and day care centers are making a bad problem worse,” said Jean Zotter, director of the Boston Urban Asthma Coalition. “While parents should opt for safer cleaning products in their homes, the state should mandate that all public buildings use safer cleaning products as one way to protect children’s health,” she said.

Tomorrow, coalition members will be testifying at the State House in support of legislation requiring safer cleaning products in schools, day care centers, hospitals, and other public facilities throughout Massachusetts. Local public buildings already using safer cleaning products include the Boston Public Schools and the Massachusetts State House. The coalition is also urging the Patrick Administration to issue an executive order requiring safer cleaning products in state-owned buildings and to issue regulations on toxins in consumer products.

Household Hazards is a review of information from over 100 scientific studies and reports about hazardous chemicals in cleaning products and specifically discusses 5 common hazardous ingredients: monoethanolamine (MEA), ammonium quaternary compounds, glycol ethers, alkyl phenol ethoxylates and phthalates. The report found that exposure to toxins in cleaning products is pervasive throughout homes in the United States and that children are especially vulnerable to the chemicals’ harmful effects. Infants’ exposure can be particularly high because they crawl on

the ground and put their hands in their mouths, ingesting chemicals from floor and carpet finishes and cleaners. Frequent use of hazardous cleaning chemicals is associated with persistent wheezing among pre-school children, and increases the likelihood of asthma attacks among children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 8.5% of school-age children in Massachusetts have asthma.

The report states that women are also more highly exposed than men, since they do, on average, over 70% of the housework. The report also points to several studies that reveal a higher incidence of asthma in populations who have high exposure to certain cleaning chemicals, such as janitorial workers.

In Boston, the Vida Verde Cooperative is an organization working to protect immigrant women working as house cleaners from toxic chemicals. “This cooperative is about changing habits and raising awareness about how all of us are responsible for doing something to leave future generations with a planet that is sustainable,” said Vida Verde’s Monica Chianelli. “We also are broadening the professional horizons of women who are so often exploited,” she said. Vida Verde is a project of the Brazilian Women’s Group, a 12 year-old Boston-based grassroots organization that advocates for immigrant rights and promotes social change.

The Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow introduced The Safer Cleaning Products Act to require that only cleaning products approved by the Department of Public Health be used in public schools, hospitals, health care facilities, day care centers and public housing common spaces. The bill, sponsored by Representative Frank Smizik (D-Brookline) and Senator Dianne Wilkerson (D-Boston), has a hearing before the Joint Committee on Public Health on Wednesday, July 25. Advocates argue that replacing toxic cleaners with safer alternatives, particularly in public schools, will help reduce asthma attacks and protect the public’s health.

“Conventional cleaners can hurt both the employees that use them as well as the children and adults who work or play in buildings where they are used,” said Representative Smizik. “Safe, cost effective and non-toxic cleaning products exist. We need to make sure we use them, especially where our children work, play, or stay for substantial periods of time,” he said.

Organizations, like the Regional Environmental Council (REC) in Worcester, a member of the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, are addressing toxic cleaning products in their communities. REC provides workshops to educate inner city residents about common products that are dangerous to their health. REC also works with small scale janitorial services and self-employed cleaners to provide them with information and support to use safer cleaning products, for example cleaners that contain hydrogen peroxide.

“Our work would be made much easier and more effective by passage of the Safer Cleaning Products Act,” said Jim Oldham, REC’s environmental justice coordinator. “Not only would the act protect our children and other users of schools other public spaces; it would also make healthy alternatives more visible and accessible to all,” he said.

To download a copy of the report, please visit www.womenandenvironment.org.