



The Alliance for a **HEALTHY TOMORROW**

262 Washington St. #301 • Boston, MA 02108 • ph 617.338.8131 • fax 617.338.6449
info@healthytomorrow.org • www.healthytomorrow.org

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CONTACT:

Cindy Luppi 617/640-2779
Elizabeth Saunders 617/869-3937
Diana Wentz 703.237.2249 X19

“NEW SHOWER CURTAIN SMELL” DANGEROUS TO HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

**New Report: More Than 100 Toxic Chemicals Released From PVC Shower Curtains
Legislators and Advocates Press for House Vote on Safer Alternatives Bill**

Boston, MA - Over 100 toxic chemicals associated with health damage are released into the air from PVC vinyl shower curtains. These chemicals make up that “new shower curtain smell” unique to PVC vinyl shower curtains and shower curtain liners, according to **“Volatile Vinyl: The New Shower Curtain’s Chemical Smell,”** a new study released today by the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, and the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ). The Safer Alternatives bill (S-2481), passed by the Massachusetts Senate earlier this session, would replace toxic ingredients in products like shower curtains with safer alternatives where feasible.

Though common in homes around the world, PVC shower curtains contain many harmful chemicals, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs), phthalates, heavy metals such as lead and mercury, and organotins.

“We spend 80% of our time indoors,” said **Julia Brody, PhD, Executive Director of Silent Spring Institute**. “We don’t need to bring home products that unnecessarily contain chemical toxins that build up inside in air and dust. Chemicals identified in the PVC shower curtain tests have been linked to cancer, reproductive problems, asthma, and effects on the brain.”

The vinyl shower curtains sent to an independent laboratory for testing were purchased at Bed Bath & Beyond, Kmart, Sears, Target and Wal-Mart. Key findings include:

- * 108 different volatile organic compounds (VOCs) were released into the air from a shower curtain over a twenty-eight day period, including those known or suspected to cause cancer, learning disabilities, asthma attacks and other health damage;
- * The level of Total VOCs measured was over 16 times greater than the recommended guidelines for indoor air quality established by the U.S. Green Building Council;
- * All five curtains contained phthalates DEHP and DINP, chemicals banned in children’s toys in California, Washington, and the European Union;
- * Seven of the chemicals found are classified as hazardous air pollutants by the EPA under the Clean Air Act.

(To see the full report, including methodology and findings, visit www.healthytomorrow.org).

“It is an enormous challenge as a parent to try to protect your children from the hazardous chemicals surrounding our families,” said Cambridge mother **Erin Rowland**. “We simply won’t succeed unless government and corporate interests take some responsibility and make changes to prevent harm to our health.”

In January, the Massachusetts Senate passed “*An Act for a Healthy Massachusetts: Safer Alternatives to Toxic Chemicals*”, co-sponsored by Representative Jay Kaufman (D-Lexington) and Senator Steven Tolman (D-Brighton). The bill, now pending in the House, would safeguard public health by replacing toxic chemicals like those detected in vinyl shower curtains with safer alternatives. Bill supporters are urging a House vote before the end of formal session this July. Similar policies have passed this session in Maine and Washington, and are already in place in the European Union.

“Toxic chemicals simply do not belong in everyday products like shower curtains, particularly since there are safer alternatives,” said **Representative Frank Smizik** (D-Brookline), Natural Resources Committee Chair. “Massachusetts should join the growing number of governments at the forefront of chemical policy reforms to better protect the health of families in the Commonwealth.”

“If we act now, the House can take a strong step to encourage economic development and product innovation through the expansion of safer alternatives,” said **Representative Paul Donato** (D-Medford), Chair of House Committee on Steering, Policy, and Scheduling. “If we can help support the launch of a new clean energy industry here in the Commonwealth, we should be able to do the same thing to support safer chemicals, products, and workplaces.”

Retailers Ikea and Marks and Spencer sell PVC-free shower curtains, but the nation’s largest retailer, Wal-Mart, has not phased out PVC shower curtains, despite its stated commitment to environmental sustainability. Bed Bath and Beyond, JC Penney, Sears/Kmart, Macys, and Target have all developed plans to offer more PVC-free shower curtains, but not all have set 100 percent PVC-free phase out plans and goals.

However, little independent analysis exists to ensure that alternative products are safer. The Safer Alternatives bill would set up a program that would compile research and assess what alternatives would be safer for workers and consumers.

“The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified indoor air pollution as a very important factor in the development of cancer,” said **Cindy Luppi**, **Clean Water Action** Program Director. “If we’re serious about preventing cancer and other similar health epidemics, we have to clean up the products like shower curtains that contribute to indoor air pollution.”

The EPA conducted a study of PVC shower curtains in 2002, which found elevated levels of four chemicals in this study as well: toluene, phenol, ethylbenzene and methyl isobutyl ketone (MIBK).

“Six years after the EPA found that PVC shower curtains continue to release toxic chemicals into the air we breathe for a month or longer, our study shows that nothing has changed. Something must be done to protect consumers from any potential harm these toxic chemicals cause,” said **Lois Gibbs**, **CHEJ founder and Executive Director**.

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