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## **NEW REPORT REVEALS LINKS BETWEEN CHEMICALS IN CLEANING PRODUCTS TO ASTHMA AND REPRODUCTIVE PROBLEMS**

### *Findings Support Massachusetts Bill for Safe Cleaning Products to Reduce Asthma*

BOSTON—A new report 'Household Hazards: Potential Hazards of Home Cleaning Products' released today points to mounting evidence that links exposure to chemicals in cleaning products to a rise in health problems, particularly asthma and reproductive harm. The national women's environmental health group Women's Voices for the Earth (WVE) authored this report to highlight the pervasiveness of these health concerns associated with household cleaning products, and the need for companies to label their products with a list of currently "hidden ingredients" which pose potential risks to human health. The report's findings support the proponents of Massachusetts' Safe Cleaning Products bill (H-2246, S-2201), which would require environmentally safe alternatives to harmful cleaning products in public buildings in an effort to reduce asthma rates and their associated costs. A hearing before the Joint Committee on Public Health on the bill will be held tomorrow, July 25 at the State Capitol Building.

The Safe Cleaning Products Bill would reduce asthma and other health threats by requiring 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 July 25 hearing will be an opportunity for public health experts and advocates such as [Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow](http://www.allianceforahealthytomorrow.org) to testify before the Committee on Public Health, after which legislators will determine which components of the bill will be put forth for a vote by the Massachusetts state legislature. The bill sponsors are Representative Frank Smizik (D-Brookline) and Senator Dianne Wilkerson (D-Boston). For a list of Massachusetts' current regulations on cleaning products, go to [www.womenandenvironment.org](http://www.womenandenvironment.org).

"This report further corroborates the science we've reviewed that shows a clear reason to take caution when using cleaning chemicals, especially due to the rising rates of asthma among our school children," said Leise Jones spokeswoman for the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, a Massachusetts coalition of over 150 organizations. "When there are safer alternatives out there, it only makes common sense for Massachusetts public schools and buildings to use them, to ensure a healthier future for our children."

Authors of the report 'Household Hazards' sent a letter to 23 major manufacturers of cleaning products including Proctor & Gamble and S.C. Johnson, (for full list, please see: [www.womenandenvironment.org](http://www.womenandenvironment.org)) requesting full disclosure of chemicals of concern to consumers through product labels. None have responded with a willingness to list these particularly harmful chemicals on its product labels. In the [letter](#) WVE states that "individuals affected by conditions such as asthma or allergies often look to avoid substances that may trigger or exacerbate their symptoms. Similarly, women who are pregnant, or trying to get pregnant, take extra precautions to avoid exposures that may impact the development of their child. Individuals with chemical sensitivities or various other diseases are also concerned about controlling their exposures to certain substances."

Some companies have said that they cannot list ingredients due to the risk of divulging trade secrets to their competitors. WVE has stated that food companies have to label ingredients despite their need to protect "secret recipes," and this system works quite well in alerting shoppers ingredients they wish to

avoid, for allergy reasons or otherwise. The group also notes that if company competitors wanted to steal a formula, they could always take it to a laboratory and determine its ingredients, with much greater accuracy than they would get off an ingredients label. “The public good from making this information readily available clearly outweighs the risk to the company,” says Alexandra Gorman, Director of Science and Research at WVE.

The report ‘Household Hazards’ points to several studies that reveal a higher incidence of asthma in populations, such as janitorial workers, who have high exposure to certain cleaning chemicals. It was also found that frequent use of certain chemicals in household products is associated with persistent wheezing among pre-school children, and increases the likelihood of asthma among children. An estimated 9 million children (12.5% of children) aged 18 or less living in the U.S. have had asthma diagnosed at some time in their lives. According to the Centers for Disease Control, asthma affects 20 million people in the U.S. and is the most common serious chronic childhood disease.

The report found that the presence of these chemicals in our daily lives is more pervasive than previously thought, and that children are disproportionately impacted by cleaning chemicals, both at home and at school, being more vulnerable due to underdeveloped immune systems. Infants’ exposure can be particularly high because they crawl on the ground, frequently putting their hands in their mouths, transferring chemicals from floor and carpet finishes and cleaners directly into their bodies. Women are also receiving more chemical exposure than men, since they are still doing over 70% of the housework in the average home. The more time women spend at home, the higher their exposure to potentially hazardous cleaning chemicals, such as monoethanolamine (MEA), glycol ethers and benzalkonium chloride.

“Food manufacturers have to list ingredients, so why shouldn’t cleaning product manufacturers? These chemicals also go into our body via our skin and our lungs. The Made in the USA label is not enough to give us confidence that our children’s health is being protected. The standards for full disclosure of ingredients should be the same, whether a product is made in the U.S. or is made in China,” said Gorman, referring to scandals around toothpaste, pet food and other products made in China.

State, county and city governments have paid increasing attention to this issue, and many have developed purchasing regulations for use in public buildings, which specify changes to milder cleaning products for daily maintenance and avoiding products that are flammable, corrosive or highly toxic. A list of government regulations and guidelines can be [found here](#).

Many consumers are already taking action to prevent overexposure to potentially toxic chemicals in their home. Some of the tips offered in the report include avoiding products that contain these chemicals of concern, using fewer products, buying products that disclose their ingredients, and never mixing products.

The release of ‘Household Hazards’ signifies the launch of a new national initiative by Women’s Voices for the Earth to tackle the rising incidence of chronic diseases among women and children linked with exposure to chemicals in consumer products. WVE’s campaign will call on major manufacturers of common household cleaning products to help protect public health by disclosing and ultimately removing hazardous ingredients from their products.

To download a copy of the report, please visit [www.womenandenvironment.org](http://www.womenandenvironment.org) on July 24. To receive a contact list of scientists who have reviewed the report, organizations working to “green” the cleaning products industry, and concerned mothers, housecleaners and others in different states across the country, please contact Alexandra Gorman at Women’s Voices for the Earth, 406-396-1639, [alex@womenandenvironment.org](mailto:alex@womenandenvironment.org).

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