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CONTACT:
Alexandra Gorman, Women's Voices for the Earth, 406-396-1639 (cell),
alex@womenandenvironment.org
Patti Wood, Grassroots Environmental Education, 516-883-0887,
pjw@grassrootsinfo.org,
Kirsten Brashares, Wellness in the Schools, 646-536-9497, Kirsten@wellnessintheschools.org

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

Findings Support 'Clean, Green Schools' Effort to Reduce Toxic Exposure for New York Students

NEW YORK— 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. A staff scientist with the national women's environmental health group Women's Voices for the Earth (WVE) drew information from over 75 reports and scientific studies, exposing a valid reason for concern about the ingredients in these products. The report highlights 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 efforts of local New York state groups Grassroots Environmental Education and Wellness in the Schools, who have pushed the state to adopt '[Childsafe Guidelines](#)' in public schools.

"Developmental disorders, asthma and childhood cancer rates are on the rise and there is mounting evidence that environmental toxins, such as those found in conventional cleaners, may be to blame," says Kirsten Brashares, Executive Director of Wellness in the Schools. "We believe in protecting children now rather than finding out later which of these commonly used chemicals was the lead or asbestos of our time."

Wellness in the Schools and Grassroots Environmental Education jointly spearheaded the first bio-based green cleaning pilot program in the New York City public schools called "Clean, Green Schools," which has received enthusiastic support from custodians, teachers, administrators and members of the New York City Council. The two non-profit groups are now approaching the Mayor's office, where they will request that all New York City public schools adopt the ChildSafe Guidelines.

"This report is a wake up call for parents that it's time to eliminate toxic cleaning products in our homes as well as our schools," says Patti Wood, Executive Director of Grassroots Environmental Education, and author of the ChildSafe Guidelines. "Children are uniquely vulnerable to toxins in their environment due to their developing physiology and natural behavioral patterns, and with effective non-toxic solutions readily available in the marketplace, there's no reason to wait."

The report authors 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) 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.

“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.

The report 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. 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.

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, including New York’s, 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 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.

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