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

### *Findings support Washington state green cleaning efforts to combat stormwater pollution*

SEATTLE—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 corroborates local group Environmental Coalition of South Seattle's (ECOSS) growing concerns about health effects on Seattle's immigrant population as well as the need to prevent stormwater and other pollution.

ECOSS's Multi Cultural Outreach Team reaches out to immigrants in the Ethiopian, Latino, Somali, Samoan and Vietnamese communities (among others) to educate families and businesses on the health and pollution hazards of working with certain cleaners. Their free Green Cleaning Kit has been offered to thousands of area residents and they are also working with English-as-a-second language businesses.

"This report is a wake-up call for businesses and families, and shows that caution needs to be taken when working with these chemicals," says Charlie Cuniff, Executive Director of ECOSS. "People for whom English is not their native language are particularly vulnerable to overexposure of toxic chemicals; the health risks exposed in this report may become more problematic in these communities if further action isn't taken."

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](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 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 rise of asthma among the kids at my son and daughter’s school is frightening,” says Brigitta Marko-Small, a mother of two living in Seattle. “The link between asthma and these chemicals in household cleaning products has me extremely concerned. Asthma is a serious condition, and this should be taken seriously by those who have the power to restrict these chemicals when effective alternatives exist.”

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. These chemicals can be found in a number of cleaning products including some all-purpose cleaners, floor cleaners and laundry detergents among others. They can be breathed in or absorbed through the skin while cleaning, and can persist in housedust well after use of the products.

“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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