



Healthy Legacy

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Who is Healthy Legacy?

A: Healthy Legacy is a Minnesota based coalition that is dedicated to safe products, made safely. We have over one million members, representing 29 organizations that range from public health, parent groups, environmental organizations, learning and developmental disability groups, faith-based organizations and more. We are working to prevent the production of unnecessary toxic chemicals that threaten the health of our communities and environment. We work to educate Minnesota communities, encourage business leadership and promote protective policies.



Q: Why are there toxic chemicals in consumer products?



A: Most people assume the products they buy (toys, personal care products, electronics, plastics and more) are tested by someone, somewhere along the line. Unfortunately, the majority of our consumer products are untested and unregulated. There are over 80,000 synthetic chemicals used in commerce today, but only 200 of them have been tested for health effects under the Toxics Substance Control Act, the U. S. law regulating industrial chemicals. Our system for regulating chemicals is severely broken and is compromising our health, our environment and our communities.

Current state and federal policies are failing to protect us in four different ways:

- #1** Most chemicals are not required to be adequately tested for safety before use.
- #2** The government usually takes action only after harm is proven and widespread, rather than requiring that a chemical is safe before going on to the market.
- #3** Certain levels of harm are accepted and allowed by government agencies.
- #4** Powerful chemical and oil companies obstruct government action to protect our health.

Q: This sounds like a federal problem, why are you working at the state legislature?

A: Historically state legislatures have been trail blazers for federal reform. When the states move, the federal government listens. A great example of this can be seen with the class of chemicals, phthalates. In 2007-2008 over a dozen states had legislation addressing phthalates, a toxic chemical commonly used in children's toys. The state action, spurred federal legislation and in the summer of 2008 a federal phthalate ban was signed into law by President Bush. Without state leadership, the federal laws would have remained stagnant.

Q: Have any states taken already action to regulate chemicals?

A: Yes, there has been significant movement in dozens of states. Washington and Maine have passed bills that establish a system for evaluating and prioritizing chemicals in consumer products. States like California, Michigan, New York and Minnesota have been trail blazers in passing legislation addressing specific chemicals in consumer products. Dozens of states are introducing legislation to protect their communities from toxic chemicals and advancing "green chemistry" initiatives, the science behind safer chemicals.

Q: Who would oppose your efforts to eliminate toxic chemicals from products?

A: These issues seem so common sense, it is hard to believe that there would be any opposition. Unfortunately, the chemical companies that manufacture these toxic chemicals are vigorously fighting this regulation. The American Chemistry Council (ACC), the biggest opposition, is the trade association for the world's largest chemical and oil companies like: Dow, DuPont, Exxon Mobil, Chevron and more. They are spending millions of dollars on lobbying efforts to oppose state and federal legislation and create confusion around the safety of their chemicals.

Q: I heard the leaching of chemicals, like BPA from baby bottles, occurs at very low levels, in the parts per billion range. Do these low doses matter?

A: Low doses do matter, especially with hormone disrupting chemicals like bisphenol A (BPA). Traditional toxicology purports "the dose makes the poison", but science over the past twenty years has turned that traditional thinking on its head and bisphenol A is the "poster child" for low dose effects. For example, BPA causes adverse effects on mammary cells at levels two thousands times lower than the current EPA safety level, which is 50.0 parts per billion. Child development is a delicate biological process, guided in part by the body's own hormones acting at exquisitely low levels and effecting every cell, organ and function of the human body. Exposures to chemicals like phthalates and bisphenol A during critical times in development can disrupt the body's natural signals and cause effects that may not show up for many years, possibly resulting in diseases such as prostate or breast cancer later in life.



Q: After doing research on the web, I found conflicting information on the safety of various chemicals, who should I believe?

A: Unfortunately, there is a large effort to confuse the science around the health effects of many of these chemicals. Like tobacco companies did in the 1980s and 1990s, chemical companies are producing their own science, which is not peer reviewed. In other words, the science they produce is not reviewed by unbiased scientists to ensure the scientific method was used in developing the laboratory experiments. The concept of “junk science” has been used for over fifty years, first coined by supporters of leaded gasoline. Look at the source and references of the data, is it funded by the government or the American Chemistry Council?

Q: Who is affected by toxic chemical exposures?

A: Everyone is affected by toxic chemicals, but communities of color, low income and indigenous communities are disproportionately impacted. What’s more, there are a disproportionate number of people of color working in factories that make these chemicals and the products they are used in. In addition, “fence line communities”, neighborhoods that surround these factories are often low income and communities of color. These communities are at an increased risk for exposure to chemicals via water, air and soil. In addition, indigenous communities who consume a lot of fish are at a higher risk from persistent organic pollutant exposure.

**Q: Are there safer products on the market? How do we know they are safer?**

A: Safer products are on the market, but unfortunately, parents have to do a research project to find safer products. To make this process easier, visit our website at healthylegacy.org to find various resources for consumers.

Q: Are the safer products more expensive?

A: Not necessarily. The price range for both safe and unsafe products varies. For example, some of the “safer” baby bottles that are made of polyethelene or polypropylene are cheaper than the toxic BPA polycarbonate plastic. On the other hand, bio-based plastics can be more expensive. There is no rule of thumb for the price of alternatives, but just because it is safer, doesn’t necessarily mean it will be more expensive.

Q: What is the difference between “risk assessment” and the “precautionary principle”?

A: Risk assessment is the current method for evaluating chemicals in the United States. It operates on the premise that there are acceptable levels of risk from exposure to chemicals. The precautionary principle would require that chemicals be proven safe before they are allowed on to the market. This would establish a system of ensuring safety *before* chemicals are used in our consumer products, rather than having to prove the chemicals are unsafe after they have already entered our homes and bodies.

Q: What is “green chemistry”?

A: Green chemistry is the science behind finding safer chemicals that are benign to our bodies and the environment. For example, green chemistry was behind the creation of safer, bio-based plastic. For more information go to greenchemistrymn.com.

Q: What can I do to protect my family?

A: There are several steps you can take to protect your family and yourself from chemicals in cosmetics, personal care products, plastics, pesticides and more. Visit the Healthy Legacy website for concrete actions to eliminate or reduce your exposure at www.healthylegacy.org.

Q: What is the most meaningful way that I can take action?

A: Wouldn't it be nice to go into a store and know the products are safe? You shouldn't have to do a research project to find safe products for your family. The single most influential way you can take action is to call your elected officials and ask them to support policies that protect public health and the environment from unnecessary toxic chemical exposures. **Your voice matters and needs to be heard.**

Write a letter to the editor for your local newspaper telling them the importance of passing these protective policies.



Finally, contact Healthy Legacy through email at: info@healthylegacy.org. We have a variety of ways you can get involved!