



Minnesota Center for
Environmental Advocacy

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NOTE: *The Price of Pollution: Cost Estimates of Environment-Related Childhood Disease in Minnesota* can be downloaded at www.mncenter.org and www.iatp.org

Environment-Related Childhood Diseases Cost Minnesota \$1.5 Billion Per Year

Preventing Disease by Reducing Pollution Could Result in Major Savings

Minneapolis/St. Paul—Pollution costs Minnesota an estimated \$1.5 billion each year in costs related to childhood disease, according to a study released today by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) and the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA).

The Price of Pollution: Cost Estimates of Environment-Related Childhood Disease in Minnesota is the first study to quantify economic impacts on Minnesota from childhood cases of asthma, learning and behavioral disorders, cancer, lead poisoning and birth defects attributable to environmental contaminants.

“There is a large body of scientific literature linking each of these childhood diseases to pollution and chemicals in the environment,” said MCEA Public Health Scientist Samuel Yamin, a co-author of the report. “We have a moral imperative to protect children from environmental health hazards, and this report demonstrates that it also makes good economic sense.”

The authors used a variety of state and national data sets to estimate how many diseases are caused by environmental exposures and how much each case costs the state. The study estimated that childhood cases of:

- Asthma cost the state \$30.6 million per year;

more

- Cancer cost the state \$8.2 million per year;
- Lead poisoning cost the state \$1.2 billion per year;
- Birth defects cost the state \$4.5 million per year;
- Neurobehavioral disorders cost the state \$303 million per year.

“Minnesota cannot afford to ignore effects on children due to environmental pollution,” said Christine Ziebold, a Minneapolis pediatrician and co-author. “Investment into a cleaner environment can have infinite returns. Children’s health care providers cannot remain neutral on the issue of pollution.”

Many childhood diseases can be prevented by reducing or eliminating key environmental contributors. The report’s recommendations included:

- Requiring non-mercury alternatives for all products;
- Reducing pesticide exposure through integrated pest management;
- Phasing out the use of toxic flame-retardants in products;
- Developing a state-wide public health tracking system;
- Providing more resources to address lead problems;
- Reforming Minnesota’s chemical regulatory system to require safer products, comprehensive safety data and phasing out the most persistent and toxic chemicals.

“Pollution is making our children sick, yet we continue to allow harmful chemicals like lead, pesticides and toxic flame retardants to get into our environment and into our children’s bodies. These findings are a challenge to legislators—let’s make our children’s health a top priority. For example, before we allow a new chemical on the market we should evaluate how many illnesses it might cause and whether we really need that chemical at all,” said co-author Kathleen Schuler, of IATP.

“My six-year-old son has asthma,” said Julia Earl, a Minneapolis resident. “Although we are fortunate enough to have health insurance, this illness very much impacts our family. In addition to the nearly \$100 a month in actual financial costs, asthma’s greatest cost to our family is worry and anxiety.”

“The tragedy is that many conditions leading to children needing special education, and the spiraling costs associated with that portion of school budgets, could be avoided through preventive action,” said Susan Nordbye, a co-author of the report.

The report is authored by Kathleen Schuler, MPH, of IATP; Susan Nordbye, MS, RD, LD; Samuel Yamin, MPH, of MCEA and Christine Ziebold, MD, Ph.D., MPH. It can be downloaded at: www.mncenter.org and www.iatp.org.

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The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy.

For more than 30 years, the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy has been the legal and scientific voice protecting and defending Minnesota’s environment. As a statewide environmental advocacy group, we work in the courts, the legislature and state agencies to develop and implement environmental change. Online at www.mncenter.org.