



Center for Health, Environment & Justice

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## **Maryland Hearing on House Bill 833**

**March 6, 2007**

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on this critically important bill. My name is Michael Schade and I'm the Campaign Coordinator for the Center for Health, Environment and Justice. CHEJ, a national environmental organization founded in 1981 by Love Canal leader Lois Gibbs, assists people to fight for justice, become empowered to protect their communities from environmental threats and leads national environmental health campaigns.

We strongly urge you to support House Bill 833, which prohibits the use of certain phthalates and bisphenol A in products such as children's toys, cosmetics, and/or baby products.

As children's minds and bodies go through the delicate processes of growing and developing, they are particularly vulnerable to chemicals that could affect proper development. Sometimes chemical exposures can come not only through the air we breathe and the water we drink, but also through common products used in children's daily lives. Phthalates and bisphenol-A are two unnecessary dangerous chemicals found in plastics that are causing increasing concern because of their potential effects on children's development and health. Unfortunately there currently are no federal laws in the U.S. prohibiting the use of these chemicals, and no way for parents to know whether the products they buy will help—or hinder—their child's development.

Phthalates are chemical substances that make PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastic soft and flexible. Among many other things, they are used in soft PVC toys and other baby products, such as teething rings, rubber duckies, and bath books. Phthalates can leach out of plastic over time, making children's natural behavior - exploring their world by putting things in their mouths - especially concerning.

Phthalates are among the most frequently found contaminants in human bodies. Exposure has been linked to serious reproductive birth defects (undescended testicles and malformed urinary tracts, conditions which have doubled in baby boys in the U.S. from 1970-1993), premature development of breast tissue, liver and kidney damage and even allergies. If safer alternatives are available, why take a risk? We stopped exposing children to lead paint. We stopped allowing children to smoke. We must take steps towards the next generation in public health policy by getting unnecessary dangerous chemicals such as phthalates off the market and replacing them with healthier alternatives.

Every year, new scientific evidence emerges demonstrating the growing risks these compounds may pose to our children's health. A 2005 report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found eleven of twelve phthalates tested were higher in children than adults (<http://www.cdc.gov/exposurereport/>). A study published in the Environmental Health Perspectives (EHP) journal in August, 2005 demonstrated for the first time a strong link between a mother's exposure during pregnancy to phthalates and adverse effects on the male reproductive system (<http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/docs/2005/8100/abstract.html>). These changes were seen at phthalate levels below those found in one-quarter of the female population of the United States. In 2005, Danish medical researchers published a study in Environmental Health Perspectives finding that 3-month-old boys exposed to higher levels of phthalates through breast milk produced less testosterone than baby boys exposed to lower levels of the chemicals, suggesting the human testis may be vulnerable to phthalate exposure during development (<http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/docs/2005/8075/abstract.html>).

Bisphenol-A is an industrial chemical that is used to make hard polycarbonate plastic. It can be found in water bottles (such as some Nalgene-brand water bottles), microwave ovenware and eating utensils, as well as in clear plastic baby bottles. Like phthalates, bisphenol-A can leach out of the plastic - especially when the plastic gets old and scratched. At even very low levels, exposure to bisphenol-A can affect our hormones. Bisphenol-A has been linked to obesity, early onset of puberty, learning disabilities, prostate cancer, and the genetic defect that causes Down's syndrome. Most major U.S. baby bottle manufacturers use bisphenol-A in their production, and there is no law prohibiting its use.

In response to this growing health problem, legislators around the world are beginning to regulate these unnecessary dangerous chemicals. In June 2006, San Francisco became the first jurisdiction in the United States to pass a prohibition on the use of phthalates and bisphenol A in toys and child care articles. Legislators in other states have introduced similar bills, including New York, California, and Minnesota. At least eleven countries have already banned or are phasing out phthalates to protect children's health, and several of the leading manufacturers of toys and baby products in the U.S. have restricted the use of phthalates over the last few years as a result of health concerns. In July of 2005, the European Parliament voted to ban certain phthalates in toys. Yet, these chemicals continue to be used in our children's toys and baby products here in the United States. This double standard is unacceptable, and may be putting children at risk of toxic chemical exposure.

For many chemicals, including phthalates and bisphenol-A, safer cost-effective alternatives exist. Some leading toy manufacturers, such as First Years, Fisher Price, Gerber, Lego Systems, Mattel, and Tyco have already begun to take the responsible path and phase out phthalates in certain toys. Whole Foods stopped selling baby bottles containing bisphenol-A.

Today you will likely hear from scientists representing the plastics industry and/or chemical manufacturers claiming phthalates and bisphenol A are perfectly safe. Of course they are going to argue this. We expect them to. After all, the tobacco industry claimed smoking was safe for decades.

Given the growing scientific evidence demonstrating the health hazards these unnecessary dangerous chemicals may pose to children, we strongly urge you to take a better-safe-than-sorry approach and protect the health of the most vulnerable populations, our children, by passing this legislation to phase out these unnecessary, dangerous chemicals.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment today.