



Stop Toxic Pollution!

A T O X I C - F R E E L E G A C Y C O A L I T I O N F A C T S H E E T · J U N E 2 0 0 4

A Strong State Plan to Protect Public Health

Over the past four years, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) has developed a groundbreaking program to phase out some of the deadliest toxic discharges in Washington — persistent toxic chemicals. Persistent toxic chemicals including mercury, dioxin, and PCBs build up in the food chain and in our bodies. These chemicals have been linked to birth defects, reproductive failure, learning and behavioral problems in young children, cancer, and other health problems. Funding was eliminated for Ecology's program in 2003, due to strong opposition from the chemical industry, pulp and paper industry, and other Washington businesses. During the 2004 legislative session, the Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition was successful in restoring the funding and getting an Executive Order from Governor Locke directing Ecology to move forward with developing plans to phase out toxic flame retardants (polybrominated diphenyl ethers or PBDEs) and implementing the state's mercury reduction plan. The legislative funding will support these efforts.

Ecology's Persistent Toxic Chemical Program Achieves Real Results

Ecology's program is responsible for monitoring fish for toxic contamination and reducing toxic discharges from sources of these deadly chemicals. The program has already achieved real results. For example:

- Recently, fish testing conducted as part of the program uncovered high levels of mercury in large-mouth and small-mouth bass in Washington's rivers and lakes. This prompted the Department of Health to issue a statewide fish advisory warning pregnant women and young children to limit the amount of bass they consume.
- The program also has developed a plan to reduce and phase out mercury. As part of that plan, Ecology recently signed an agreement with the Washington State Dental Association to have dental offices install mercury pollution control equipment by August 2005.
- Working with the Department of Health, Ecology has begun to implement the new mercury law passed by the Washington State Legislature in 2003.

The Need to Phase Out Persistent Toxic Pollution in Washington

- Persistent toxic pollution harms public health. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Toxics Release Inventory, Washington ranked fifth in the nation for the amount of dioxin discharged to water in 2000 (the most recent year for which information is available). The current average daily intake of dioxin by humans is more than 200 times the amount the EPA considers safe.

Fish consumption warnings like this one from the Duwamish in Seattle can be found at numerous waterways in Washington due to persistent toxic pollution.



Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition

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- Recent studies show toxic flame retardant chemicals (PBDEs) in human breast milk and fish in Washington. In the first nationwide tests for chemical fire retardants in the breast milk of American mothers, Environmental Working Group found high levels of these little-known thyroid toxins in every woman tested, including in Seattle. In a recent study by Northwest Environment Watch, levels of PBDEs found in the breast milk of Puget Sound area women were 20 to 40 times higher than levels found in Europe or Japan. Also, recently published data show a rapid increase of PBDEs in Columbia River fish collected at the headwaters — amounts of PBDEs doubled in merely 1.6 years.



- Persistent toxic pollution harms fish and other wildlife, including orca whales. Puget Sound orca whales are among the most contaminated marine mammals in the world. They are contaminated with PCBs, which were banned in the United States nearly 30 years ago but still are found in the mud of every urban bay, and in many links in the Puget Sound food chain.
- Preventing persistent toxic pollution saves money in healthcare costs. A new study published in *Environmental Health Perspectives* estimated that more than \$54 billion in healthcare costs is spent on America's children each year because of environmental causes of lead poisoning, asthma, cancer, and neurobehavioral disorders. Spending money to help prevent these diseases in Washington children is a good investment.

- Persistent toxic pollution is widespread in Washington. Seventy-five bodies of water in Washington exceed water quality-limits for persistent toxic chemicals. There are 39 toxic sites contaminated with dioxin and hundreds more contaminated with other persistent toxic chemicals such as PCBs, PAHs, and mercury.

The Public Strongly Supports Phasing Out Persistent Toxic Chemicals

According to a recent poll conducted in Washington, Michigan, and Maine, 80% of Americans support a comprehensive policy to phase out persistent toxic chemicals.

Ecology is doing the right thing by saying that these chemicals must be phased out, and by developing this strategy. We should be proud to live in the first state to take this kind of action.

Please contact us to find out how you can be involved in efforts to ensure that this program continues to be funded and implemented.

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