

PRESS RELEASE

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Chemical Reform Urgent for People of Color and Low Income Communities

*Underserved communities disproportionately impacted by Failed regulatory policy, legacy contamination, and resulting illness
Congress Introduces Safe Chemicals Act of 2011 to Reform Chemicals Law*

(Washington, DC) **The Environmental Justice & Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform** is watching how Congress handles introduction of the Safe Chemicals Act of 2011 proposed today by **Senator Frank Lautenberg** (D-NJ) to reform the nation's chemical regulations, the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 (TSCA). Senator Boxer (D-CA), Senator Schumer (D-NY) and Senator Klobuchar (R-MN) are co-sponsors of the new legislation. The Act has provisions on some long standing environmental justice concerns, including a new program to identify and specifically address communities that are toxic "hot spots" and consideration of the cumulative exposure of chemicals.

“Scientific research has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that communities of color and people living in poverty are disproportionately impacted by chemicals that ought to be regulated by TSCA but aren't,” says **Jose Bravo**, Executive Director of the **Just Transition Alliance** in San Diego, CA. “Senator Boxer has taken courageous leadership in protecting the health of children in hot spot areas. We commend her for taking such action. Now all of Congress must act quickly and decisively to ensure equal protection to low income neighbors of polluting facilities and the workers inside who handle dangerous chemicals every day.”

“We are happy Senator Schumer has co-sponsored the Safe Chemicals Act of 2011. We are watching other members of Congress to see if they will support addressing toxic hot spots across America or not.” says **Cecil Corbin-Mark**, Director of Policy Initiatives for **WE ACT for Environmental Justice**, a New York based Environmental Justice Organization. Hot Spots are places of heightened air, water and soil pollution that occur most commonly in economically disadvantaged communities and communities of color that present heightened toxic exposures for residents. “Much of this pollution is well known to government representatives and imperils the health of children and adults across generations. Legacy chemicals, those left behind without cleanup by polluters who refuse to remediate their contaminated land are contributing to asthma, low birth weight, and cancers in our communities.”

“Illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer have contributed to large health inequities in environmental justice communities as the amounts of poorly regulated chemicals linked to these illnesses has increased,” according to **Mark Mitchell, MD**,

Chair of the **National Medical Association's Environmental Health Task Force**. NMA is the oldest and largest association of Physicians of Color. "The numerous routes of chemical exposure – from polluting facilities, trash incinerators, highways, landfills, pesticide sprayings and chemical-laden products in the home – must be addressed urgently to save this generation and the next from avoidable illnesses."

Martha Dina Arguello, Executive Director of **Physicians for Social Responsibility – Los Angeles**, says, "We applaud Senator Boxer for co-sponsoring the Safe Chemicals Act of 2011. We believe this legislation can address the cumulative and synergistic effects of exposure to hundreds of unregulated chemicals. It must be a top priority for ultimate TSCA reform. In conjunction with our work in California we can achieve immediate action to address known bad actor chemicals and their associated health effects."

The Environmental Justice & Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform is working with **Safer Chemicals Healthy Families**, which has identified environmental justice priorities as among the essential hallmarks of meaningful TSCA reform. Safer Chemicals Healthy Families is committed to supporting EJ efforts to provide equal health protection for people living on the fenceline of polluting facilities, working people, and their families.

"TSCA reform has got to focus on the communities and families that are shouldering the biggest impact," says **Richard Moore** of **Los Jardines Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico**. "Lately some members of Congress seem in the mood to put at risk the most vulnerable people through massive budget cuts. It's time to protect workers and their families on the frontlines of chemical exposure: the people who actually make our economy go."

Monique Harden, Esq., co-Executive Director of **Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, based in New Orleans and Washington, DC**, adds: "For too long Congress has enacted environmental laws that don't protect our human right to health, but instead codify the status quo of industrial operations. As a result, the United States lags behind numerous other countries that have established environmental human rights standards. Congress now has the opportunity to enact a law that respects our human right to a healthy environment."

"Indigenous Arctic peoples are among the most highly exposed people on earth to toxic chemicals, because these chemicals—DDT, PCBs, brominated flame retardants, and perfluorinated compounds, to name a few—are persistent, and drift hundreds and thousands of miles north on wind and ocean currents from where they are manufactured from more southern latitudes. These chemicals contaminate our traditional foods and affect our health and the health of our children," says **Vi Waghiyi** (Yupik Eskimo) Tribal Member, Native Village of **Savoonga, Yupik** community on **St. Lawrence Island, Alaska**, and Environmental Health and Justice Program Director, **Alaska Community Action on Toxics**. "We call upon Alaska Senators Lisa Murkowski and Mark Begich to

take a leadership role in protecting the health of our people in co-sponsoring this important legislation.”

Tom Goldtooth (Dine' and Dakota), Executive Director of the **Indigenous Environmental Network**, headquartered in Bemidji, Minnesota adds: “The legacy of petrochemical plants, mining operations and manufacturers and big users of chemicals have polluted Native Nations and generations of our people. The result is cancer and other illnesses among our people, young and old. Native communities urge all members of Congress to act now on TSCA to protect our future.”

Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) introduced The Safe Chemicals Act of 2011 today. **Senator Amy Klobuchar (R-MN), Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA)** are original co-sponsors. Environmental and Health Advocates across the spectrum are demanding a focus on under served communities most harmed by chemical exposure.

Available for Interviews:

Martha Dina Argüello, Executive Director, Physicians for Social Responsibility — Los Angeles, CA. 310.261.0073, marguello@psr-la.org. Martha can address a variety of toxic chemical exposure issues — to communities of color, about educating physicians, and what has happened in California regarding reforming state chemical regulatory policy. She has been involved in the California Green Chemistry Initiative.

Jose T. Bravo, Executive Director, Just Transition Alliance, San Diego, CA. 619.838.6694, jose@just-transition.org. Jose works with communities contaminated with chemicals, which occurs mostly where people of color and low-income residents live.

Monique Harden, Esq, co-Executive Director of Advocates for Environmental Human Rights in New Orleans, LA and Washington, DC. 504.799.3060, mharden@ehumanrights.org. Monique is an attorney with expertise on human rights and environmental legislation and judicial decisions in the U.S. and abroad. Her organization’s litigation on behalf of African American residents of Mossville, LA has led to a precedent by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, which decided for the first time to take jurisdiction over a case of environmental racism in the United States.

Cecil Corbin-Mark, Director of Policy Initiatives and Deputy Director for WE ACT for Environmental Justice (WE ACT) in New York, NY. 212.961.1000 ext. 303, Cecil@weact.org. Cecil can address environmental justice and chemical exposure issues.

Pam Miller, Founder and Executive Director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics. 907.222.7714, pkmiller@akaction.net. Pam can address the drift of POPs chemicals from lower hemispheres, putting Indigenous peoples in the Arctic at great risk for illness from

chemical contaminants. She can also address the several hundred toxic waste dump sites in Alaska, now leaking chemicals due to global warming, and contaminating water, soil and air near communities.

Mark A. Mitchell M.D., MPH, Co-chair of the Environmental Health Task Force for the National Medical Association, the oldest and largest association of Physicians of Color. 860.794.9497, mmitchell@enviro-md.com. Mark can talk about health disparities linked to environmental issues, as well as hot spots, legacy chemicals, increased susceptibility and unanticipated exposures in environmental justice communities.

Richard Moore, Los Jardines, Institute in Albuquerque, NM, 505.301.0276, ljnewmexico@gmail.com. Richard can talk about environmental justice issues and organizing in the Southwest.

Vi Waghiyi, Environmental Health and Justice Program Director, Alaska Community Action on Toxics. 907.222.7714 or 907.444.9194 (cell). Vi can speak to the shocking chemical test results of the St. Lawrence Island, Alaska traditional foods and human health bio-monitoring results of Alaska native people.

Resources

Senator Lautenberg's announcement

<<http://lautenberg.senate.gov>><<http://lautenberg.senate.gov>>

Letter to Congress on TSCA Reform, 2010

<<http://www.louisvillecharter.org/EJLettertoEPA04.2010.shtml>><<http://www.louisvillecharter.org/EJLettertoEPA04.2010.shtml>>

Principles of Environmental Justice

<<http://ej4all.org/environmental.principles.php>><<http://ej4all.org/environmental.principles.php>>

Toxic Wastes and Race and Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty

<<http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/environment/toxic-waste-20.html>><<http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/environment/toxic-waste-20.html>>

Safer Chemicals Healthy Families

<<http://www.saferchemicals.org>><<http://www.saferchemicals.org>>