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“Safe Chemicals Act of 2011” Introduced Today

Legislation Would Protect American Families from Toxic Chemicals

(Washington, DC) -- Signaling their clear intention to protect families from toxic chemicals linked to serious health problems, Senators Frank Lautenberg, Barbara Boxer, Amy Klobuchar, Charles Schumer and others today introduced the [“Safe Chemicals Act”](#) to upgrade America’s outdated system for managing chemical safety. (Click [here](#) to watch video of Sen. Lautenberg talking about the bill.)

The Act responds to increasingly forceful warnings from scientific and medical experts -- including the President’s Cancer Panel -- that current policies have failed to curtail common chemicals linked to diseases such as cancer, learning disabilities, infertility, and more. The Senate’s Safe Chemicals Act builds on momentum from 18 states that have passed laws to address health hazards from chemicals; and numerous corporate policies of major American companies restricting toxic chemicals, including Staples, SC Johnson, Wal-Mart and Kaiser Permanente.

“The whole world has woken up to the ragged holes in our federal safety net for chemicals,” said Andy Igrejas, Director of *Safer Chemicals, Health Families*, a coalition of 280 health, environmental and business groups. “We need a new law to put commonsense limits on toxic chemicals both to protect American families, and to give a leg up to American firms in a world market that increasingly demands safer products.”

The Safe Chemicals Act would overhaul the 35-year-old Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), which is widely perceived to have failed to protect public health and the environment. Specifically the Act would:

- Require EPA to identify and restrict the “worst of the worst” chemicals, those that persist and build up in the food chain;
- Require basic health and safety information for all chemicals as a condition for entering or remaining on the market;
- Reduce the burden of toxic chemical exposures on people of color and low-income and indigenous communities;
- Upgrade scientific methods for testing and evaluating chemicals to reflect best practices called for by the National Academy of Sciences; and
- Generally provide EPA with the tools and resources it needs to identify and address chemicals posing health and environmental concerns.

“Under current law, EPA is powerless to act against even the most notorious chemicals,” said Richard Denison, Ph.D., Senior Scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund and a leading expert on TSCA. “The Safe Chemicals Act would provide EPA with the authority it needs to protect public health; the marketplace with the information companies need to innovate safe products; and consumers with the comfort in knowing that their families are being protected,” he concluded.

Passed in 1976, TSCA’s presumption that chemicals should be considered innocent until proven guilty was a sharp departure from the approach taken with pharmaceuticals and pesticides. Since then, an overwhelming body of science has shown that presumption to be unfounded. Published studies in peer-reviewed journals have shown many common chemicals can cause chronic diseases and can be toxic even at low doses.

Once thought to pose little likelihood of exposure, we now know many chemicals migrate from the materials and products in which they’re used – including furniture, plastics and food cans – into our bodies. The federal Centers for Disease Control has found that the blood or tissues of almost every American carry hundreds of these chemicals, some present even before birth. Yet under TSCA, EPA cannot restrict even the most dangerous of these chemicals and lacks the information it needs to evaluate how this complex mixture of chemicals affects our health. EPA has been able to require testing of only a few hundred of the 62,000 chemicals that have been on the market since TSCA was passed 35 years ago, a number that has increased to 85,000 chemicals today.

“The science on the links between chemicals and cancer is clear and more widely accepted than ever before,” said Nancy Buermeyer of the Breast Cancer Fund, a national advocacy organization that focuses on prevention. “Still, every day millions of families are coping with the devastation of cancer diagnoses. We must protect the public’s health from dangerous or untested chemicals, and there’s no time to wait. Congress should act now on chemical policy reform.”

"This proposed TSCA reform would enable EPA to swiftly address chemicals that we know can harm babies' developing brains, and require testing of chemicals for safety before they go into products," said Maureen Swanson of the Learning Disabilities Association. At a time when we face increasing rates of autism and ADHD, parents and expectant parents shouldn't have to worry that the products they buy might contain chemicals that can interfere with brain development and learning."

Advocates predict action in this Congress despite the partisan divide. They point to support from many businesses for reform of TSCA, including major chemical and consumer product companies such as Dow, BASF, and Procter & Gamble. They also point to the strong bipartisan support for chemical safety legislation at the state level, and public opinion research that consistently shows overwhelming bipartisan support for reform.

“The Safe Chemicals Act is a win for both public health and the economy. Smart businesses want to help make reform happen because it’s in their financial interest to make safer, healthier products,” said Igrejas.

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