

# Pollution



# in people



**A Study of Toxic Chemicals in Washingtonians**

## Every day, we bring home products to improve

**our lives:** non-stick pans to ease kitchen cleanup; toys for our kids to play and learn with; personal-care products to help us look our best. We expect government agencies to check these products out and okay their ingredients.

But the surprising truth is that the ingredients in everyday household products undergo little to no scrutiny by federal or state agencies. Research shows that many of these ingredients can cause cancer, learning deficits, and other health problems.

The Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition asked ten Washington residents to donate blood, urine, and hair for toxic chemical testing. Laboratories tested for the plasticizing chemicals known as phthalates;

the flame retardants PBDEs; the heavy metals lead, arsenic, and mercury; perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) like those used to make Teflon; pesticides; and the banned but persistent chemicals PCBs and DDT.

Our study revealed that toxic chemicals have traveled to the worst possible destination: our bodies. New chemicals policies are needed today, to keep chemicals that can harm our health out of industries and out of everyday products.

### Toxic Pollution Found In Washingtonians

Toxic Chemicals	Pam Tazioli	Bill Finkbeiner	Karen Bowman	Ann Holmes Redding	Lisa Brown	Louise Valeriano	Patricia Dawson	Denis Hayes	Allyson Schrier	Deb Abrahamson
PFCs ("Teflon chemicals")	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PBDEs (toxic flame retardants)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Phthalates (plasticizers and fragrance carriers)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pesticides		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
DDT (banned pesticide)	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
PCBs (banned industrial coolant)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mercury	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lead			✓	✓						
Arsenic	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		

### What We Found

**Toxic chemicals contaminate us.** Every person tested had at least 26 and as many as 39 of the toxic chemicals we looked for in his or her body. This bodily pollution came from food; everyday household dust; products such as personal care items, consumer electronics, and stain-resistant furniture; and contaminated soil, air, and water.

**Chemicals in our bodies threaten our health.** This

study and others show that the levels of toxic chemicals in our bodies are at or near those that can lead to health problems such as infertility and learning deficits.

**Government isn't protecting us.** State and federal government have failed to prevent the use of harmful chemicals in consumer products, manufacturing processes, and food production. Most chemicals are virtually unregulated, because federal law does not require testing for harmful effects before chemicals are allowed for use in products or manufacturing.

# Toxic chemicals are all around us

- in our air, our water, our food, the products we use.

## They're in our bodies, too.



### Pesticide Sprayer

- Pesticides are used in agriculture as well as homes and gardens
- We found pesticides in 6 of the 10 *Pollution in People* study participants
- Pesticides can harm the nervous system and may cause cancer



### Vinyl Lunchbox

- Vinyl, or PVC, may contain phthalates and lead
- For young children, there is no safe level of lead, which can cause learning deficits



### Food

- PCBs, DDT, mercury, and pesticides contaminate food
- Three *Pollution in People* participants had mercury above safe levels
- All of our participants had PCBs and eight had DDT in their bodies. Both chemicals were banned 30 years ago



### Television

- Plastics in electronics often contain PBDEs as flame retardants
- Up to 5% of U.S. women have dangerously high levels of PBDEs in their bodies
- In laboratory animals, PBDEs cause learning deficits



### Pizza Box

- Pizza boxes and other greasy-food packaging are often treated with PFC-containing products for stain protection
- PFOA, used to make PFCs, doesn't break down. The chemical is accumulating in children's and adults' bodies
- Studies show PFOA is likely to cause cancer



### Perfume Bottle

- Perfumes, lotions, nail polish, and other personal-care products often contain phthalates
- All *Pollution in People* participants had these chemicals in their bodies
- Phthalates may harm boys' reproductive development

## A Better Way for a Healthy Washington

Washington state is already a leader in phasing out some dangerous chemicals such as mercury. Now, the state can take the next step to protect the health of its residents by developing a common-sense chemicals policy that ensures only the safest chemicals are used in consumer products, manufacturing, and food production.

### What Washington Leaders Can Do

#### Test chemicals for safety—before they're used in products

- Chemicals should be tested for safety before they are ever allowed for use—just like pharmaceuticals are.
- Companies must make testing results available to government agencies and the public.

#### Take out the toxics and make products safe

- Chemicals that can damage children's intellectual development, harm reproduction, cause cancer, or build up in our bodies are commonly used in everyday products like cologne and non-stick pans.
- Washington state should develop immediate plans to phase out of products and manufacturing chemicals that build up in our bodies or are linked to serious health problems.

#### Choose a better way

- Forward-thinking companies have taken steps to develop products with ingredients known to be safe and to produce food without pesticides.
- Washington state must assist companies in replacing hazardous chemicals with safer substances and practices, using requirements, incentives, and technical assistance.

### What You Can Do

#### Meet with Your Legislator

One of the most effective things each of us can do is talk face-to-face with decision-makers about our concerns. Contact the Washington Toxics Coalition at 206-632-1545 ext.120 to participate in a meeting with your state representatives and/or senator to talk about the problem of toxic chemicals.

#### Tell Your Friends and Neighbors

- Throw a *Pollution in People* party to inform your neighbors and friends about the toxic chemicals in people. Contact the Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition for a speaker and help planning the party.
- Host a Safe Cosmetics house party. You can download a party kit at [www.safecosmetics.org](http://www.safecosmetics.org).
- Tell your colleagues. If you are a health professional interested in hosting a presentation regarding the study and the science behind toxic chemical exposures, the Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition can provide speakers. Contact Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility at 206-547-2630 to make arrangements.

#### Make a Healthy Change in Your Community

Stop pesticide use in your local school or park. Contact the Washington Toxics Coalition for help, or download an action kit at [www.watoxics.org](http://www.watoxics.org). Go to Publications and click on Pesticide Action Kits.

# Find out more at [www.pollutioninpeople.org](http://www.pollutioninpeople.org)

Pollution in People is a project of the Toxic Free Legacy Coalition of Washington State.  
206-632-1545 ex.123 • [www.pollutioninpeople.org](http://www.pollutioninpeople.org)