

TOXIC TIMES

News from the Center for Environmental Health

~ SPRING 2004 ~

Welcome to the very first electronic issue of Toxic Times, a newsletter from the Center for Environmental Health (CEH). Every day we learn more and more about health hazards from chemical exposures, and every day CEH is working to protect your health and promote safe alternatives for business and healthy communities. Our team is working hard to keep you informed; we hope this e-newsletter – along with our website at www.cehca.org – becomes your way to keep connected to the issues you care about. Please send us your [feedback and comments!](#)

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The Center for Environmental Health is a non-profit organization that protects the public from environmental and consumer health hazards. We are committed to environmental justice, reducing the use of toxic chemicals and supporting communities in their quest for a safer environment and corporate accountability.

We count on the generosity of our supporters!

PLEASE consider making a tax-deductible donation TODAY, [online](#) or by check to
 Center for Environmental Health
 ATTN: Basmah Mourad
 528 61st Street
 Oakland, CA 94609

Mother's Day is fast approaching. This year, shop pesticide-free at OrganicBouquet.com! A bouquet of fresh organic blooms for your beloved mom further supports CEH's efforts. OrganicBouquet.com, our partner in environmental responsibility, will generously donate to CEH 20% of all your Mother's Day purchases at their website.

THANK YOU!

Down on the Fish Farm: What You Should Know About Farmed Salmon

Salmon has many positive health benefits that make it an important food. However, because of environmental pollution, salmon can be contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a cancer-causing chemical.

PCBs in farmed salmon are high because fish farms typically raise salmon on feed that is high in fatty fish and fish oils. Since PCBs in the environment accumulate in the fatty tissues of animals, this diet results in fish with high concentrations of the cancer-causing chemical. Numerous studies, including a major study published in January in the peer-reviewed journal *Science*, have found high concentrations of PCBs in farmed salmon, yet federal regulators have failed to take action.

Since government has failed to act, CEH has taken action to protect the public from toxics in farmed salmon. In January, along with the national Environmental Working Group (EWG), we filed legal notice of our intent to sue dozens of manufacturers, distributors and retailers of farmed salmon, in order to force them to address this potential cancer risk in their products.

"The salmon farming industry must stop needlessly exposing consumers to a cancer risk in every bite," said Michael Green, Executive Director of CEH. "Some responsible salmon farmers have already taken steps to reduce PCB levels in their feed stocks. Now we are challenging the entire industry to make farmed salmon safer for every one."

CEH Action Alert!

- ◆ Ask your local grocery store manager to provide safer salmon options. For more information about some safer brands of farmed salmon, and other steps to protect your health, check out our [Consumer's Guide to Salmon](#).

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San Francisco First to Adopt Precautionary Principle

The City of San Francisco is officially the first city in the country to implement the Precautionary Principle as city policy. The Precautionary Principle states that where there is a serious threat of harm to our health or the environment, we should take action to prevent more harm. The first major phase of the legislation – which CEH helped to draft through the early part of last year – passed the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in June 2003.

Continuing our leadership role in the Bay Area Working Group on the Precautionary Principle, CEH has since been working with the San Francisco Department of Environment (SFE) to create a public participation process for step two of the process. This involves the development of a “precautionary purchasing ordinance” for the city.

“The City of San Francisco purchases \$600 million worth of goods and services per year,” Katie Silberman, CEH Associate Director, points out. “So its market leverage is substantial. Purchasing in a precautionary manner, San Francisco will create a mass market for everything from recycled office paper to hybrid-fuel vehicles.”

The Bay Area Working Group, a coalition of environmental health and justice groups formed to promote precautionary policies locally and statewide, has helped pass similar Precautionary legislation in Berkeley, and is working to implement the Principle in Oakland.

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Don't Trash Computers – Recycle them!

In a meeting brokered by CEH last year, representatives from healthcare giants Kaiser Permanente and Catholic Healthcare West have agreed to adopt green electronics purchasing guidelines. The hospital representatives were also amenable to the next steps needed to pressure computer makers to take responsibility for their obsolete equipment.

CEH and long-time collaborator Health Care Without Harm joined hands with Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, Clean Production Action and others in the Computer Take Back Campaign (CTBC), an international campaign which aims to promote among the healthcare sector environmentally sound choices in their procurement and management of computer assets. CEH has also been a leader in the process of developing computer procurement guidelines for Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) members.

Mamta Khanna, CEH Pollution Prevention Program manager, was invited in December 2003 to join the Computer Take-Back Campaign (CBTC) Steering Committee, giving CEH even greater leadership in the campaign.

CEH Action Alert!

- ◆ Many computer makers like Dell, HP, Gateway and others now offer recycling options. Contact them to have

your old equipment recycled. Or, for an electronic recycler near you, check out Basel Action Network's directory of planet-friendly [electronic recyclers](#)! These vendors have pledged to recycle used electronics responsibly, following strict standards of True Stewardship. If there isn't one in your state, tell your computer recycler to sign the [True Stewardship Pledge](#).

- ◆ Organize a screening session with your friends and family to watch the film *Exporting Harm*, to learn more about socially responsible electronic waste management practices. You can order a copy of the video [here](#).
- ◆ Health care administrators: View a [presentation](#) on green electronics procurement.

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Wood Playground Update: A New Threat Looms

While CEH lawsuits and policy advocacy helped to end the use of arsenic by the wood treatment industry, in 2003, a new chemical threat from this industry rose on the horizon. EPA was asked by industry to register a new chemical, called Acid Copper Chromate (ACC), for use in treated wood. Leaching of hexavalent chromium – the main ingredient in ACC – from treated wood could subject children and communities to increased risks of kidney and liver damage, birth defects, and skin ulcers, as well as contaminate drinking water and increase risks to workers.

CEH staff worked with our allies nationally to create a coordinated response to EPA, and to date the chemical has not been registered.

CEH Action Alert!

- ◆ Contact Mr. Stephen Johnson, EPA Assistant Administrator for the Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances, and urge the agency to deny the registration of this toxic threat to our children's health. Comment by [e-mail](#), fax at (202) 501-1470 or phone at (202) 564-4711. Click [here](#) for more background information.

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Protecting Children from Lead in Consumer Products

CEH holds corporations accountable for their use of toxic chemicals. We challenge them in order to reduce or eliminate toxic chemicals in their consumer products and emissions. When necessary, we use public interest litigation and other means to force polluters to comply with the law. In 2003, we began investigating the potential exposure to lead in children's jewelry and garden hoses.

Throughout fall 2003, our litigation team spent countless hours procuring black vinyl jewelry marketed to teens and children, because of potential lead exposures. "Lab testing showed a severe risk of lead leaching from these products, suggesting that the risk of exposure to young people is very great risk. In December, we filed notices of our intent to sue 33 retailers and distributors who make or sell lead-contaminated jewelry.

We also began investigating in 2003 garden hoses that may leach lead into water. When children drink from these hoses, they could be ingesting unsafe levels of lead. We filed notices of our intent to sue seven makers of garden hoses, including Sears (Craftsman brand), Martha Stewart and Goodyear. We are urging the companies either to switch their production material to 100% lead-free recycled vinyl or to a non-PVC material.

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Coming up: Green Roundtables for Healthy Hospitals

Our work places CEH in a unique position to bring hospitals, workers, and affected communities together in discussion forums focusing on toxics reduction. Currently, the San Francisco Bay area does not have such forums where stakeholders concerned about hospital waste can engage in face-to-face collaboration. Such forums have proven effective in Philadelphia and Portland, where similar relationships between environmentalists, hospital administrators and affected communities have been established.

Our Green Roundtables will bring hospitals and these key stakeholders together to share resources and case studies of successes and challenges, to spur the industry on to greater achievements in protecting public health through pollution prevention. Through the Roundtables, participants will find solutions, resources and tools to reduce toxic risks in their facilities.

Hospital staff or administrators interested in learning more can contact CEH Pollution Prevention Program Manager [Mamta Khanna](#).

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Staff Update

- ✓ Anjuli (Ani) Gupta joined CEH in March this year, as our Community Health and

Environment Project Coordinator. With several years experience organizing within the environmental justice movement, Ani is poised to bring CEH's leadership role in the Collaborative for Health and the Environment.

The Collaborative was formed in 2002 to establish a network of health-affected communities, health professionals and health advocate organizations. On her role, Ani asserts, "Our Community Health and Environment Project's goals are a two-way street: utilize the network's vast resources in the medical sciences to support community struggles for environmental justice; and bring policy solutions and research questions from community leaders to the CHE network. This way everyone benefits."

Most recently, Ani, CEH staffer Micaela Davis and CEH Intern Lara Cushing traveled through Central California with a group of environmental health advocates, learning about pesticide-related problems in rural communities. In a single week in late April, two major pesticide exposure accidents hit this agricultural region, affecting a bus load of school children and 19 farm workers. Careless agricultural practices and an ill-prepared emergency response system put many farm-worker communities in a vulnerable position; some of the workers' immigration status pushes them further into marginality.

- ✓ CEH Executive Director Michael Green traveled to Chicago and Cleveland to hold CEH events in March, in order to raise awareness of our work and increase our Midwestern supporter base. We had a great turnout and are exploring potential collaborations with Midwestern partners as a result of the trip.
- ✓ In April, Senior Policy Analyst Joe Guth was one of four representatives from US environmental NGOs invited to a joint US EPA-EU meeting in Virginia to discuss international chemical policy.
- ✓ Associate Director Katie Silberman is writing a series of monthly environmental health e-alerts for the California-based Women's Foundation. To receive these informative, action-oriented alerts, send an e-mail to [Basimah Mourad](mailto:Basimah.Mourad@ceh.org).
- ✓ Pollution Prevention Program Manager Mamta Khanna traveled to Philadelphia in April to present her work in electronics procurement for healthcare at CleanMed, an annual gathering of hundreds of senior administrators from major national health care providers.

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CEH on the Wire

- ✓ Our legal action against salmon farms was featured in the April issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives*, a pre-eminent journal of the environmental health movement. Joe Guth's letter to the Editor in response to an earlier article on

chemical policy was also published in the April issue.

- ✓ Our salmon action was also featured in wire reports printed in over 30 newspapers across the country, and Michael Green was interviewed for national Canadian television, for *PlanetCheck* (a new national environmental update running on Al Franken's Air America Radio), and for Pacifica radio's *FlashPoints*. The salmon cases were also mentioned in a February 11 editorial in the Wall Street Journal.
- ✓ In March, Michael was a guest on Pacifica radio's *Against the Grain*, on ways consumers can avoid toxic exposures from plastics.
- ✓ In February, CEH was mentioned as an environmental group for business to watch out for in *PR Week*, the leading newsletter of the public relations industry.
- ✓ Michael Green was featured as "local boy makes good" in the *Environment* column of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* on March 19.
- ✓ Joe Guth's letter to the *San Jose Mercury News*, on the lawsuit by workers exposed to toxic chemicals at IBM, was published in March.
- ✓ CEH Intern Anita Sarah Jackson had two letters to the Editor on regional environmental health issues published in the *Oakland Tribune* in March and April.

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Our Wish List

It's Spring and if you're spring cleaning, keep CEH in mind. CEH wishes for the following:

- ✓ a copy of Adobe Photoshop
- ✓ a scanner
- ✓ a digital camera
- ✓ a small laptop
- ✓ flat-screen monitors
- ✓ a color printer

For donations of any electronic equipment, please contact [Burton Li](#). All other donations, contact [Basmah Mourad](#). Equipment and other donations are tax-deductible!

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