

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Detoxing Our Products & Our World

Dear EcoGirl: In last month's column, you talked about the toxics being found in our products and our bodies. How can I better protect myself and my family from these harmful materials? *Signed, Health Seeker*

Dear Seeker: Thank you for your question. Yes, unfortunately, all of us in this culture are being regularly exposed to multiple toxics that are known to threaten our health and environment.

You can reduce your exposure by looking for independent information to help guide your everyday purchases and practices. (See my resources at the end of this column.) It's also vital that we support the activists who are working hard (often on a volunteer basis) to reduce our shared toxic exposure.

However, it's an arduous process to challenge one material at a time, especially when hundreds of thousands of chemicals are used by industry worldwide. And, really, why is it even up to us to do this, simply to stop being poisoned in our everyday lives? Why aren't products just made safe from the start?

Greening Products by Design

It's this idea of making products "benign by design" that led to the creation of Green Chemistry (GC), a methodology that helps chemists minimize the health and environmental impacts of their materials early in the development process, thus creating safer products, less toxic waste, and cleaner air and water. (For more about GC, see www.epa.gov/gcc/pubs/principles.html and www.nature.com/news/2011/110105/full/469018a.html.)

It's also this vision that inspired folks to create California's pioneering Green Chemistry Initiative (GCI), which was signed into law in 2008. GCI's mission is to encourage the use and development of greener

materials, require greater disclosure of toxic risks, and prioritize chemicals of concern in consumer products. Even some industry groups prefer GCI's comprehensive approach over the current by-chemical approach. (For more about GCI, see www.dtsc.ca.gov/PollutionPrevention/GreenChemistryInitiative/upload/GREEN_Chem.pdf.)

Unfortunately, GCI's regulatory implementation has veered off track, to the extent that, when the official rules were proposed last November, GCI's original supporters called for them to be withdrawn. Thankfully they were.

The next steps in this process are now being organized, and certainly the status quo interests will be promoting their agenda, so we also need to speak up for the community's well-being.

ACTION: Write Governor Jerry Brown and ask him to ensure that California implements a strong Green Chemistry Initiative in a timely manner that's consistent with its original vision of protecting our health and our world. You can get his contact information at http://gov.ca.gov/m_contact.php.

You might mention that Green Chemistry can help reduce the cost and suffering of the illnesses caused by toxics, as well as aid businesses in creating safer workplaces, reducing waste, and trimming liability and recall costs. It also allows companies to stay competitive in a global marketplace that increasingly prioritizes healthier products.

If we want to truly stop toxics' harm, we must act on both the personal and community levels. Avoiding toxics beforehand saves us the much greater costs of trying to clean them up after they're dispersed into our world!

For more about GCI's journey, see www.changecalifornia.org/green-chemistry-initiative and www.dtsc.ca.gov/PollutionPrevention/GreenChemistryInitiative. Also check out "Green Chemistry Is Good For Business"

at www.forbes.com/2010/08/17/green-chemistry-business-environment-opinions-contributors-craig-criddle-robert-bergman.html.

Helpful Resources

I offer various resources to help you avoid everyday toxics and nurture your health. For instance, you can: **peruse my previous columns online** at www.askecogirl.info, **read my ongoing news and tips** at www.facebook.com/AskEcoGirl, and **get my "insanely useful" booklets**, either for yourself or as a nurturing gift, via www.askecogirl.info/booklets.html.

You might also want to **read The Next STEP newsletter**, which I write. This "helpful guide to less-toxic living" is distributed by the City of Sebastopol to its residents in their water bills, and is available online. See recent issues at www.healthyworld.org/STEPRecent.html. Also look up specific toxics and alternatives at www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html. To be informed when a new issue is posted, just email that request to STEPV@healthyworld.org.

Here's to our health!

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of [The Organic Guides](#), and Editor and Lead Writer for [The Next STEP](#) newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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