



NEWS RELEASE

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Health Care Sector Supporting Chemical Reform Legislation on Eve of Hearing *Toxic Chemicals Contribute to Chronic Disease Epidemic, Sector Says*

(Washington, DC) Health care sector leaders are urging Congress to move swiftly to pass chemical reform legislation, citing the measure as critical to public health protection. On the eve of tomorrow's hearing on the "Toxic Chemicals Safety Act of 2010," a bill intended to overhaul the nation's chemical regulatory system, the sector is highlighting the link between preventing disease, containing costs, and reforming the law.

"In order to reduce the chronic disease burden of Americans and to contain health care costs, we need to eliminate toxic chemicals that have trespassed into our bodies and into our lives," stated Gary Cohen, President of Health Care Without Harm, an organization that works to help hospitals reduce the amount of environmental harm associated with the delivery of health care. "There is a wave of real concern in the health community about the link between the widespread exposure to chemicals and the overwhelming epidemic of chronic disease burdening the U.S. health care system."

Earlier this year, the President's Cancer Panel issued a dire warning about the role chemicals play in the development of some cancers, and called on the president to use the power of his office "to remove the carcinogens and other toxins from our food, water, and air that needlessly increase health care costs, cripple our Nation's productivity, and devastate American lives."

With a significant body of evidence linking chemical exposures to a wide range of diseases and health conditions, the health care sector has begun to transform itself by developing more ecologically sustainable operations to protect patients, employees and communities.

"This is an important issue for Catholic health care providers because of our commitments to improve public health, to provide safe health care, and to protect all aspects of creation," said Julie Trocchio, senior director for community benefit and continuing care with the Catholic Health Association of the United States, representing Catholic sponsored hospitals, health systems, and long-term care facilities. "We welcome legislation that seeks to eliminate exposures to harmful chemicals and protects the health of our communities, especially vulnerable populations who may be most harmed."

"Kaiser Permanente invests significant time and resources to identify products free from chemicals that are harmful for humans or the environment," stated Kathy Gerwig, Vice President, Workplace Safety and Environmental Stewardship Officer of Kaiser Permanente. "That degree of investment is simply not feasible for most products and materials we buy, nor is it possible for most organizations that do not have the resources and skills that we have developed over decades."

One of the problems facing health care as it attempts to reduce chemical exposures is the lack of publicly available information on the chemical ingredients of many products used daily in health care facilities. Chemical companies are not required to disclose the ingredients or the health and safety of their chemicals to product manufacturers. The legislation would require chemical manufacturers to provide basic health and safety information for all chemicals as a condition for them remaining on or entering the market. It would also require them to make that information public.

"In health care, we have a moral imperative to do no harm. We are very pleased this legislation gives the EPA the proper authority to restrict the most toxic chemicals," stated Gina Pugliese, vice president of the Premier Healthcare Alliance's Safety Institute. "Requiring the EPA to incorporate the latest science will go far to help determine the impact these chemicals could have on patients, healthcare workers, the environment and local communities, thereby achieving a higher standard of safety."

The legislation—H.R. 5820—was introduced by Congressmen Bobby Rush (D-IL) and Henry Waxman (D-CA) and is similar to a bill introduced in the Senate in April by Senator Lautenberg (D-NJ), called the "Safe Chemicals Act of 2010". If the bills are enacted, it would be the first time that the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)—the legislation by which the EPA regulates chemicals—has been updated since it was passed 34 years ago. In that period, the EPA has only required testing on approximately 200 of the more than 80,000 chemicals on the market.

"Most people believe that the chemicals we use today would not be on the market unless they are safe," stated Cohen. "Unfortunately, this is not true. Chemicals have been regulated under a lax and ineffective system that puts the burden of proof on consumers and those harmed by the chemicals, not on the chemical industry itself. The bill would give the EPA the authority and tools it needs to better protect our society from unregulated toxicants."

A legislative hearing on the Toxic Chemicals Safety Act will take place in the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection in 2123 Rayburn at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, July 29. For a webcast of the hearing, go to [the Energy and Commerce website](#).

HCWH is an international coalition of more than 430 organizations in 52 countries, working to transform the health care industry worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it is ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health and the environment. As a founding member of Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families, a diverse coalition committed to TSCA reform, HCWH will work to ensure the passage of the newly introduced legislation. Visit the [chemicals section](#) of the Health Care Without Harm website for more information.

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