



Fighting for Safe Chemicals

There is growing consensus that the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), enacted in 1976, to regulate the use of chemicals based on their risk to human health or the environment, is failing to protect Americans from toxic chemicals. In the 34 years since TSCA took effect, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been able to require testing on just 200 of the more than 80,000 new chemicals produced and used in the U.S., and just five chemicals have been regulated under this law. The surprising truth is that under current U.S. law, chemicals are allowed to enter our homes, workplaces, and communities with little or no testing for human toxicity.

Why Nurses Want Chemical Policy Reform

Because exposure in the workplace puts nurses and other health care workers at an even higher risk:

- Nurses are exposed to industrial cleaners, floor strippers, pesticides, sterilants, disinfectants, chemotherapy, and a multitude of other chemicals in the workplace. Nurses in occupational health settings, emergency departments and visiting nurses encounter chemically contaminated patients routinely.
- In partnership with Physicians for Social Responsibility, ANA joined in the release of a bio-monitoring study of physicians and nurses in October 2009. The inquiry found that all 20 participants had toxic chemicals associated with health care in their bodies. Each participant had at least 24 individual chemicals present, four of which are on the EPA list of priority chemicals for regulation. All are associated with chronic illness and physical disorders.

Because nurses care for those whose health has been affected by chemicals and exposure has serious implications for public health:

- Studies continue to demonstrate the link between chemical exposure and serious illness, including cancer, reproductive and developmental disorders, neurologic diseases and asthma.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 133 million people in the U.S. —almost half of all Americans— are now living with these and other chronic diseases and conditions, which now account for 70% of deaths and 75% of U.S. health care costs.ⁱ
- Estimates of the proportion of the disease burden that can be attributed to chemicals vary widely, ranging from 1% of all disease to 5% of childhood cancer to 10% of diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and neurodevelopmental deficits, to 30% of childhood asthma.ⁱⁱ

ANA's commitment to chemical policy reform began in 2006 when the ANA House of Delegates overwhelmingly passed a resolution entitled "Nursing Practice, Chemical Exposure and Right-to-Know." In this landmark resolution, our members called on us to:

- Promote action(s) at the state and national level that will reduce and streamline the elimination of toxic chemicals and require use of safer alternatives when possible.
- Support disclosure about adverse health effects.
- Demand adequate information on the health effects of chemicals before they enter our workplaces and homes.

Studies continue to demonstrate the links between chemicals in everyday products and serious illnesses, and because of the many chemicals nurses and other health care workers are exposed to in the workplace, they are at even higher risk.

ANA strives to protect the health and well-being of the 3.1 million registered nurses whose interests we represent, as well as that of patients and communities.

We know that chemical exposure is unsafe, both for nurses and patients, and the public: it's time to change our nation's chemical policy.

- The CDC's Fourth National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals showed that over ninety percent of participants had Bisphenol A (BPA), Perfluorochemicals (PFCs) and polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), among other chemicals as part of their body burden.
- Babies are being born pre-polluted. A study by the Environmental Working Group shows babies can carry a body burden of over 287 industrial chemicals prior to birthⁱⁱⁱ.
- American women's breast milk has the highest levels of brominated flame retardants in the world.^{iv}

Reforming TSCA - It's time for common sense changes to TSCA that will:

- **Take immediate action on the most dangerous chemicals**

Current laws aren't protecting us from chemicals that are building up in our bodies and threatening our health. These persistent, bioaccumulative toxic chemicals should be phased out of commerce. Our exposure to other toxic chemicals that we know can cause serious health problems, should be reduced. Green chemistry research should be expanded, and safer chemicals favored over those with known health hazards.

- **Hold industry responsible for the safety of their chemicals and products**

Due to serious limitations of the current law, very little is known about the vast majority of the tens of thousands of chemicals produced and used in the US. Over the past three decades, the EPA has required testing on just 200 existing chemicals and restricted only five. Companies that make and use chemicals should be required to provide full information on the impact of all their chemicals on health and the environment. The public, workers, and businesses should have access to information about the safety of chemicals.

- **Use the best science to protect all people and vulnerable groups**

Chemicals should meet a standard of safety for all people, including children, pregnant women, and workers. The extra burden of toxic chemical exposure on people of color, low-income, and indigenous communities must be reduced and more studies must be done to detect which chemicals are present in our bodies. The EPA should adopt the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences on how to better assess risks from chemicals. And regulators should expand the development and use of information gleaned from "biomonitoring," the science of detecting human chemical contamination, to inform and impel efforts to reduce such exposures.

ANA is one of several founding organizations belonging to the diverse and growing coalition, *Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families* (SCHF). ANA agrees with SCHF's TSCA Reform platform:

- Immediately initiate action on worst chemicals
- Require basic information for all chemicals
- Protect the most vulnerable
- Use the best science and methods
- Hold industry responsible for demonstrating chemical safety
- Ensure environmental justice
- Enhance government coordination
- Promote safer alternatives
- Ensure right to know

ⁱ National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, *The Power of Prevention: Chronic Disease...the Public Health Challenge of the 21st Century*, (Washington, DC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).

ⁱⁱ Safer Chemicals Health Families, *The Health Case for Reforming the Toxic Substances Control Act*, (2010).

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.ewg.org/kid-safe-chemicals-act-blog/ewg-research/>

^{iv} http://www.noharm.org/all_regions/issues/toxins/bfrs/