

# **PVC: THE *POISON* PLASTIC**

## **THE CAMPAIGN FOR SAFE, HEALTHY CONSUMER PRODUCTS**



### ***PVC – Hazardous Consumer Product***

PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastic, commonly referred to as vinyl, is one of the most hazardous consumer products ever created. PVC is dangerous to human health and the environment throughout its entire life cycle. Our bodies are contaminated with poisonous chemicals released during the PVC lifecycle, such as mercury, dioxins, and phthalates, which may pose irreversible life-long health threats. When produced or burned, PVC plastic releases dioxins, a group of the most potent synthetic chemicals ever tested, which can cause cancer and harm the immune and reproductive systems.



### ***New car or shower curtain smell? The smell of PVC***

PVC is useless without the addition of a plethora of toxic additives, which can make the PVC product itself harmful to consumers. These chemicals can off-gas or leach out of PVC, posing risks to children and consumers. New car smell? New shower curtain smell? That's the smell of poisonous chemicals off-gassing from the PVC. One of the most common toxic additives is DEHP, a phthalate that is a suspected carcinogen and reproductive toxicant readily found in numerous PVC products. Children can be exposed to phthalates by chewing on vinyl toys. While it is still legal for US retailers to sell PVC children's and baby toys containing dangerous phthalates, the European Parliament voted in July, 2005 to

### ***Children may be exposed to toxic phthalates when chewing on PVC toys.***

permanently ban the use of certain toxic phthalates in toys. One EPA study found that vinyl shower curtains can cause elevated levels of dangerous air toxins, which can persist for more than a month.

### ***Environmental Injustice***

PVC plants are disproportionately located in low-income communities and communities of color, making the production of PVC a major environmental justice concern. Communities surrounding vinyl chloride facilities suffer from groundwater and air pollution. In 1999, the federal government measured dioxins in blood samples taken from 28 residents who lived near PVC facilities in Louisiana. The testing revealed the average resident has three times more dioxin in his/her blood than the average U.S. citizen. Workers at PVC plants may face life-long health risks from exposure to cancer-causing vinyl chloride and other hazardous chemicals used to make PVC. These health risks include angiosarcoma of the liver, lung cancer, brain cancer, lymphomas, leukemia, and liver cirrhosis.

## **Hazardous to Firefighters and Building Occupants**

When heated in a building fire, PVC releases toxic hydrogen chloride gas, forming deadly hydrochloric acid when inhaled by firefighters and building occupants. Firefighters face harmful occupational exposures when battling fires laden with PVC building materials and consumer products. Building occupants may be killed from inhaling toxic PVC fumes before they are able to escape. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, the EPA measured the highest ambient air concentrations of dioxins ever near ground zero, likely due to the combustion of PVC and other chlorinated materials.

## **A Contaminant to Recycling**

PVC cannot be effectively recycled due to the many different toxic additives used to soften or stabilize PVC, which can contaminate the recycling batch. Most consumers do not know that a 3 in the recycle symbol indicates that the plastic is made of PVC, and therefore recycle those products, inadvertently rendering thousands of potentially recycled containers useless. In fact just one PVC bottle can contaminate a recycling load of 100,000 PET bottles. Recycling of PVC is negligible, with estimates ranging from 0.1% to 3% of postconsumer PVC waste being recycled.

## **Safer, Healthier Alternatives are Readily Available**

The good news is that safer, cost-effective, alternatives to PVC are readily available for virtually every use. From safer plastics, to bio-based materials, there is a growing market replacing hazardous PVC products. You can help build consumer demand for safer, healthier products by avoiding the purchase of PVC. *One way to be sure if the packaging of a product is made from PVC is to look for the number "3" inside or the letter "V" underneath the universal recycling symbol.* In addition, soft flexible plastic products that are made with PVC often have a distinct odor, such as vinyl shower curtains. If you suspect that a product is made of PVC, contact the product manufacturer and ask them directly about the materials used in the product or packaging and your concerns about PVC.

## **Innovative Companies Transitioning to Safer Products**

In response to the toxic lifecycle of PVC, a growing list of companies have committed to phase out PVC products and switch to safer, healthier products. Some of these companies include:

- Bath and Body Works
- Honda
- Ikea
- Johnson and Johnson
- Microsoft
- Nike
- Toyota
- Victoria's Secret
- Wal-Mart

## **Get Involved in the PVC Consumer Campaign!**

### **Help Us Get the Poison Plastic Off Store Shelves**

Over the next year, the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ)'s BE SAFE network has launched a PVC campaign to encourage major corporations to phase out their use of PVC and to support policies that phase out PVC. We have already convinced Microsoft, Johnson & Johnson, Wal-Mart, Crabtree & Evelyn, Victoria's Secret, and Bath and Body Works to phase out their use of PVC in their packaging! We want to leverage these victories to build momentum for further commitments to safer products in the years to come. We would like you to be part of this successful effort by being part of the campaign.



**To get involved, e-mail CHEJ's PVC Campaign at [mike@besafenet.com](mailto:mike@besafenet.com) or give us a call at 212-964-3680.**

**Log onto [www.besafenet.com/pvc](http://www.besafenet.com/pvc) to learn more.**