



The Center for Environmental Health Wishes You a Happy and Healthy Back-to-School Season

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Happy Labor Day!

We send our thanks and appreciation to our allies in organized labor who continue to work against the odds, protecting families, human rights, and justice in our country.

The historic conflict between labor and environmental health is a myth created by industries that are threatened by the green-blue alliances we are building in spite of their misinformation.

Laborers, activists, and organizers, we applaud your tireless efforts to support your families, defend your dignity, earn fair wages, and secure healthy working conditions. It is work like yours that truly makes our nation stronger. We pledge to continue working to complement your efforts with initiatives of our own that eliminate the dangerous chemicals that are part and parcel of the lives of all-too-many working people in our country today.

Our best to you this Labor Day!

Latest Victory: Eliminating Lead from Baby Bibs at Toys R Us



We weren't surprised earlier this month at Toys R Us's response when the Center for Environmental Health revealed in a [New York Times exclusive](#) that the supposedly child-friendly retailer was selling vinyl contaminated baby bibs. In spite of the well documented facts, Toys R Us insisted that the leaded bibs "meet extremely high safety standards" and refused to take immediate action to protect children. After all it was a Wednesday – a big media day that would have given nationwide attention to any such admission of guilt.

While there is still no federal law on lead in children's products, parents were angry and Toys R Us faced a public relations nightmare, if not a legal one. Its dirty bibs contained between three and four times the amount of lead that is allowed in paint. And Center for Environmental Health staff were all over the news making this threat to children's health known. (Catch Charles Margulis and his daughter Lucy on San Francisco's ABC affiliate [here](#).)

Rather than admitting it exposed babies to lead, Toys R Us said nothing more for two days. Then late in the afternoon on Friday August 17th – too late for any major television news outlets to pick up the story – Toys R Us quietly announced that it had taken the toxic bibs off shelves throughout North America.

CEH was ready with a press release that the Associated Press and the New York Times both used as the basis for their stories. See [here](#).

We're thankful that public pressure forced Toys R Us to pull the bibs and protect children from one more unnecessary source of lead. But the truth is that Toys R Us and every other major retailer know well that lead risks and vinyl go hand-in-hand. The time has come for major retailers to eliminate this poison plastic from children's products.

Do you have questions about the lead-tainted bibs? Check our [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Help the Center for Environmental Health Protect Families

We're pulling into the homestretch of the Center for Environmental Health's 10th Anniversary Campaign. To those of you who have already donated, we send our gratitude. We are close to achieving our ambitious \$200,000 goal.

To those of you who haven't made your donation yet: why not take a minute to make a secure on-line donation? It's fast, it's easy, it's safe, and best of all it, your donation will be matched by our 10th Anniversary Campaign's lead donors.

**DONATE
NOW**

This will instantly double each gift over \$100, helping CEH kick off our second decade with more cutting-edge legal work to protect children, families, and communities from the unknown dangers lurking in products like lunchboxes, baby bibs, and children's jewelry.

Thank you for supporting public health!

Click [here](#) to make a secure, online donation.

Dangerous Chinese Imports: A Red Herring



Recent attention to Dangerous Chinese Imports (DCIs) has prompted many national media outlets to ask the Center for Environmental Health for our reaction. Our response: DCIs are a red herring. The discussion of DCIs diverts consumer outrage from its rightful target -- the U.S.-based corporate retailers who have sent American manufacturing jobs overseas, demanding dangerously cheap production from foreign suppliers.

We noticed the trend of DCIs in the media when Lou Dobbs covered our first baby bib case (against Wal-Mart) in May.

Interestingly, Dobbs left the omni-retailer unscathed but decried the nefarious doings of "communist Chinese" hell-bent on poisoning innocent American babies.

This antiquated, yellow-peril vitriol may score the pundits a few Nielsen points, but it does nothing to protect children's health.

Behind the current wave of toxic products and food scares is not an angry factory manager in Guangzhou with an axe (and a hammer and sickle) to grind against the American public; it is the economic anarchy that encourages global industries to favor dangerously cheap production over product safety and long-term sustainability.

Long before the directive to remove lead from a children's product gets passed from Bentonville to Beijing, a much more dangerous business-as-usual demand follows that same route: "Cheaper, and we don't care how." This demand (and not a vast, Chinese

conspiracy) lies at the root of recent announcements by Fisher-Price and Mattel that Big Bird, Elmo, Dora the Explorer, and some eighty other kinds of toys are contaminated with dangerous levels of lead. But Dobbs and others seem content to focus their righteous indignation on China, rather than on the home-grown companies whose business practices are responsible for the lead in hundreds of children's products.

The solution is not flag waving fury and righteous indignation; it is the adoption of a national standard that requires industry to conduct a full life cycle analysis of their consumer products.

A life cycle analysis evaluates the health impacts of every stage of a product's life, from development to disposal. It evaluates the product's design and the materials required for its manufacture. It also considers the process for making the product, distributing it, using it, and ultimately discarding it.

Workers and consumers, whatever country they live in, want to make, buy, and use safe products. It's up to industry to ensure comprehensive safety throughout the life of the products they profit from.

In the meantime, absent the will of industry to protect children it's up to consumers to demand that retailers act responsibly.

Food Safety in an Era of Food Scares

The past few months have seen a rash of food scares, including industrial toxins in pet food and recalls of peanut butter (for Salmonella contamination) and canned meat (for botulism). While food borne illness is always a possibility, a few simple tips on food buying and handling will keep most problems out of your kitchen.



- Keep children and other vulnerable family members safe: Children under age 6 are most vulnerable to food borne illnesses. Others, including pregnant women, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems, are also more vulnerable and need to take stronger precautions. Some foods these groups should avoid: unpasteurized juices, raw milk or cheese, raw sprouts, and raw seafood.
- Buy Local, Organic Food: When you choose food from local growers, you have the chance to ask questions about their food safety practices and get answers directly from those responsible. You can establish no such relationship with an industrial supplier like the transnational food giant ConAgra, which produced the Salmonella-tainted peanut butter that was traced to hundreds of illnesses and at least one death.

- Thorough cooking: With headlines about dangerous E. coli bacteria linked to spinach and other leafy greens, it is easy to forget that ground beef is by far the leading source of E. coli contamination. This year, numerous ground beef recalls have affected meat sold in dozens of states. To ensure safety, ground beef should be cooked to a minimum 160°. Cook beef and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops to at least 145°, and all cuts of fresh pork to 160° F. Poultry should reach 180° in the thigh; 170° in the breast meat.
- Washing produce: Leafy greens, even pre-washed bagged products, and other fresh fruit and vegetables should be thoroughly washed and dried before eating. Given the recent E. coli cases, some experts advise that those most vulnerable should consider eating only cooked greens.
- Avoid cross-contamination: Improper storage or handling of meat and produce can lead to hidden dangers, when pathogens from meat are carried to other foods in your kitchen. To avoid problems, keep raw meat, poultry, fish, and their juices separate from other food; place securely wrapped packages of raw meat, poultry, or fish in the meat drawer or coldest section of your refrigerator; always wash hands before and after handling raw meat, seafood and poultry; also after cutting meat and seafood, wash cutting board, knife, and counter tops with hot, soapy water.

A Hidden Health Threat on Our Cars: Lead Wheel Weights



Did you know that the materials used when you get a tire changed or balanced could add lead to our drinking water?

Small metal wheel weights keep a vehicle's wheels in balance and are usually clipped on to the rim of the wheels. But they can and do easily fall onto roadsides, where they wear down and sometimes wash into waterways. The weights made of lead leach that dangerous neurotoxin into our drinking water.

And these small weights add up. In California alone, approximately 500,000 pounds of lead is released into the environment from wheel weights annually.

In 2005, Europe banned the use of lead wheel weights. Korea and Japan are also phasing out the use of lead weights, as are most major auto makers. But Chrysler still makes new cars with lead wheel weights, and the three major wheel weight manufacturers still supply the tire repair industry with lead wheel weights.

To end the threat that lead wheel weights pose to our drinking water, the Center for Environmental Health [took action](#) earlier this month. We filed legal notices to Chrysler and the three leading wheel weight producers, informing them that their products are an illegal

source of water pollution under California law. Speaking about this effort, CEH Research Director Caroline Cox stated, "Since affordable, effective alternatives exist, there is no excuse for the continued use of lead that can end up as a water hazard to people and the environment."

To see the CEH press release and our report, *Polluted Highways, Poisoned Waters: Lead in Wheel Balancing Weights* click [here](#).

Walking the Talk on Energy and Global Warming

Like you, staff members of the Center for Environmental Health are deeply concerned about the reality of climate change. Recognizing our obligation to do our part to reduce our energy consumption, we conducted an audit of our office's energy use earlier this year. Along the way, we compiled some tips that we hope are useful to you in your home and office:



- Next time you buy a computer, choose an Energy Star model. They use 70% less electricity than computers without this designation.
- Make sure your computer is completely switched off at the end of every working day instead of just being locked or left on standby. This will save an additional 17% of unnecessary energy use in any given 7 days.
- Switch your incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescents to save up to 75% of the energy you use for lighting. Remember: these bulbs contain mercury and must be recycled. Check <http://earth911.org/> for more details.
- Instead of bottled water, use a quality stainless steel water filter. In our office, we estimate that this simple tip eliminated 1300 pounds of CO2 emissions per year and saved us over \$1000 during that same time.
- Lower the thermostat on your water heater. A setting of 120°F provides comfortable hot water. If you use a dishwasher, you can get by with a setting of 140°F.
- Plug your home computer, printer, DVD player, stereo, TV, cell phone charger, microwave, etc. into power strips. Then switch the strip off when you're not using these appliances. Appliances like these use electricity any time they're plugged in -- up to about 5% of a household's annual usage.
- If you use an air conditioner, set your thermostat as high as comfortably possible in the summer. For every degree you lower the temperature, the energy use rises by 6 percent.

- No need to run the air conditioner or wintertime heater when no one is home. Install a simple programmable thermostat, and set timers to have the air conditioning come on 30 minutes before your family arrives home.
 - Caulk, seal, and weather strip your home.
 - Get an energy audit, and find out how you can cut consumption. Many utilities offer free audits for homes and businesses. Contact yours for details.
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Spotlight on a Staff Member: Caroline Cox



Caroline Cox is the Center for Environmental Health's research director. You can read her biography [here](#).

Caroline took a few moments from her day last week to answer a few questions.

Q: What's a typical day like for you?

A: It feels like months since I had a typical day. That's partly because my job involves lots of different things, and my work is really varied. I spend a lot of time doing research online, reading scientific papers, looking for new products to work on, talking to labs, talking to attorneys, and talking with the media.

Q: How did you get into pesticide work?

A: In 1978 my husband Al and I had just bought our first home, and we were excited that we'd finally have a garden of our own. We planted peas first. But soon after, Al saw a truck spraying down the alley. When we checked the peas, all the new leaves on the plants were shriveled and twisted. I called the Department of Agriculture and had them come out and look at the peas, but they just hemmed and hawed. So I called a local group that worked on pesticide issues, and started volunteering. That's how I got involved in Northwest Coalition to Alternatives to Pesticides, where I worked as Staff Scientist for 16 years.

Q: Why should we care about pesticides?

A: Pesticides are unique, because unlike other toxic chemicals, they're designed to kill. They're one of the few toxics that are intentionally dispersed.

Q: What do you most want to accomplish?

A: I take pride in promoting the use of alternatives to toxic chemicals. That means changing how people and corporations think.

Q: What do you find most frustrating about your job?

A: YOU HAVE TO ASK? Write this down: when my computer doesn't function.

Q: When not at work, what do you enjoy?

A: I spent a long time raising kids, and even though my three daughters are grown, I still really enjoy being a mom in whatever way is appropriate. My daughters are 26, 24, and 21 years old.

Q. What is most rewarding about your work?

A. When I feel like I've made a difference in the way toxic chemicals are used. I'm really grateful to work at the Center for Environmental Health.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like CEH supporters to know about you?

A. I'm always looking for ideas for public interest litigation. CEH supporters should feel free to share their ideas with me at caroline@cehca.org

Michael Green Ready to Return from Sabbatical

After ten years of running the Center for Environmental Health, Michael Green, the organization's founder and executive director, has taken a four-month sabbatical courtesy of a [grant](#) from the California Wellness Foundation.

To the surprise of many who know Michael well, he's been disengaged from the Center for Environmental Health's work throughout this period, and he is clear that this has benefited him. He also believes that this time has given him a new perspective on the organization and the best ways for him to contribute to its future successes. He is looking forward to returning to work in late September and putting this insight to use.



Staff and board members agree that Michael's sabbatical has been a tremendous growth opportunity, requiring us all to refine the way the organization works. We expect that these changes will serve the Center for Environmental Health long after Michael's re-entry.

We also hope that supporters of the organization see in this summer's successes what we all feel: that our mission continues to be an urgent one and that the Center for Environmental Health will remain enduring and effective presence on the national and local public health landscape.