



Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Maine

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PRESS RELEASE

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Public demands action from LePage administration on toxic phthalates

Overflow crowd turns out for Maine DEP public hearing on citizen-initiated right-to-know proposal

Manufacturers would be required to report their use of the hormone-disrupting chemicals in household products

(AUGUSTA) Over 70 parents, physicians, business owners, and public health professionals overflowed the hearing room at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) this afternoon, calling on the agency to take action on chemicals called phthalates (pronounced THAL-ates). Today's public hearing was the result of a citizen-led petition effort that has forced the DEP to consider a new policy for phthalates. The proposed rule would elevate four phthalates from "high concern" to "priority chemical" status under Maine's Kid-Safe Products Act and require manufacturers to report their use in products sold in Maine.

"No parent wants to hear their pediatrician say the words 'cancer', 'learning disabilities', 'birth defects', or 'asthma'," said Tracy Gregoire of the Learning Disabilities Association of Maine. "And no parent would purposely expose their child to chemicals that could cause any of these serious illnesses. We all have a right to know which products contain these dangerous hormone disruptors. We're here today because we're tired of waiting for this most basic information about where to find phthalates or how to avoid them."

Phthalates are toxic chemicals that disrupt testosterone and thyroid hormones, harm the brain and the immune system, and threaten early childhood development and reproductive health. Human health studies show that exposure causes birth defects of male sex organs, sperm damage, learning and behavior problems, and asthma and allergies.

"Why phthalates, and in particular, why these four phthalates?" said Dr. Deborah Rice, retired Maine CDC toxicologist and former Senior Risk Assessor for the U.S. EPA, "There is overwhelming evidence that the four phthalates under present consideration present a serious risk to human health based on both hazard and exposure."

Dr. Geoff Gratwick, a family physician and state senator from Bangor spoke to the energetic, sign-waving crowd at a press conference before the hearing. Gratwick shared [a new report from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) that states that about 10% of women in the U.S. have levels of phthalates in their bodies that are above the levels thought to be protective of fetal health. The report also states that about 5% of U.S. infants are exposed to phthalates above acceptable levels.

“Well documented science leaves no doubt that phthalates are harmful to fetuses and children – especially boys,” stated Gratwick. “We also know that phthalates readily escape from products and enter the human body through breathing, eating, and skin contact. Toddlers are more highly exposed than adults because of their frequent hand to mouth activity. Based on the substantial evidence of both hazard and exposure, now is not the time to put our heads in the sand about phthalates. In fact it is only reasonable and appropriate that we collect information about which products are the source of the exposure.”

Earlier this year 25 Mainers had their bodies tested for the presence of seven different phthalates. The results, published in [“Hormones Disrupted: Toxic Phthalates in Maine People”](#), were shocking to many of the participants and ignited the citizen-initiated petition effort to find out more about which everyday products contain the dangerous chemicals.

“I got the results of the testing and my jaw dropped,” said Paige Holmes, a mother of two young boys from Lisbon. “Despite everything I have done to proactively protect my sons from harmful chemicals, I had the highest total level of phthalates in my body out of everyone in the group, and higher than 90% of all Americans. Where did my exposure come from? I’m an avid label reader but with phthalates I’m left in the dark – unable to protect my family from these harmful chemicals. We all have a right to know what’s in our products so we can protect our loved ones and ourselves.”

Study participants and other activists gathered and submitted the signatures of 2071 Maine people to the DEP – more than 13 times the number needed to initiate the rule-making process. Petition signers came from 168 towns representing every county in Maine. Signers included 125 legislators – Republicans, Democrats, and Independents – many of whom were the first to sign from their towns.

The Maine Small Business Coalition, which is comprised of 3,400 businesses from across the state, submitted a letter to the DEP in support of the proposed rule that was signed by 126 members. Bettyann Sheats, owner of Finishing Touches in Auburn, told the crowd, “Collecting information about which products contain phthalates is good for our businesses and the responsible thing to do. No business owner would knowingly choose to expose themselves, their families, and their customers to known toxic chemicals like phthalates, but the fact is, businesses are as much in the dark as consumers. This is about building a healthier future for our kids. It’s time to pass smart, low-cost policies that create market incentives for safer alternatives – leverage that Maine’s small businesses cannot possibly create on our own.”

Phthalates are commonly used in consumer products found in the home. They are used in soft vinyl plastics, such as lunch boxes, kids’ backpacks, school supplies, rain jackets, packaging, and flooring. They are also hidden behind the word “fragrance”, where they end up in cosmetics, lotions, and other personal care products. Testifiers showed DEP staff at the hearing a variety of common products that could contain phthalates, but for which information is not currently available, as well as a stack of scientific documents that support the draft rule’s assertions of harm and exposure.

“How much illness, disability and death could have been avoided if the risks of exposure to secondhand smoke had been publically acknowledged sooner,” stated Edward Miller of the American Lung Association of the Northeast. “The volume of science was growing well before the Surgeon General brought the issue to light in his 1986 report. Certainly we are in the relatively early days of our understanding of the health effects of toxic chemicals in

consumer products. But we have more than enough scientific data to not make the same mistakes we made with tobacco. Maine parents, pregnant women, and their families have a right to know when they are at risk so they can take precautionary steps if they so choose.”

Holmes added, “I’m frustrated that there are seven phthalates sitting idle on the DEP’s Chemicals of High Concern list, despite clear and overwhelming science about their dangerous impacts. As far as I’m concerned, the DEP has been asleep at the wheel and needs to step up, acknowledge this problem, and take meaningful action to protect Maine children and pregnant women. And I think most people here today would agree with me about that. Maine kids shouldn’t have to wait one more day for safer chemicals.”

The DEP will collect public comments until September 29th, at which time they will have 120 days to act on the proposal. They can also choose to do nothing.

The draft rule can be found [on the DEP website](#) under Chapter 888.

The Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Maine is a coalition of over 50 public health, medical, parent, community, women’s, worker, environmental, and public interest organizations dedicated to protecting public health and the environment by replacing unnecessary dangerous chemicals with safer alternatives. www.cleanandhealthyme.org