



News Advisory 3/2/06
Congress Struggles to Ratify Global Toxics Treaty—
Alaskans Emphasize Importance of Protecting Northern Peoples

States' rights to a healthy environment and public health protections are threatened by a bill proposed in Congress, according to environmental and public health advocacy groups. The U.S. Congress is considering legislation to implement the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), an international treaty to eliminate a class of harmful chemicals worldwide that was signed by the U.S. in 2001. Before the U.S. Senate can ratify the treaty, Congress must make modest changes to laws that govern pesticides and industrial chemicals. Two bills now in Congress propose dramatically different approaches to modifying the laws. Environmental and public health groups across the country are calling on Congress to pass the more protective of the two, in a letter released today by 45 organizations across the country.

A legislative hearing on the POPs Treaty legislation is scheduled for Thursday, March 2, 2006 at 10:00 a.m. in 2123 Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, DC. The hearing is convened by the Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials.

On December 16, 2005 Representative Paul Gillmor introduced H.R. 4591, a bill to modify the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). Gillmor's bill is nearly identical to a 2004 version of the legislation roundly rejected by minority Democrats, and sharply criticized by legal, public health, and environmental experts. **On February 16, 2006 Rep. Hilda Solis, Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials, introduced H.R. 4800, an alternative bill that would amend TSCA to satisfy U.S. obligations under the Stockholm POPs Convention.**

The Solis bill requires prompt regulatory response by EPA once the United States commits to opt-in on a new POP chemical, and **adopts the health-based standard that is at the heart of the POPs Convention**, requiring EPA to implement the control measures in a manner that protects against "significant adverse human health and environmental effects." **Under the Gillmor TSCA bill (H.R. 4591), EPA actions are completely discretionary, and if they choose to regulate, economic costs could trump protection of human health.**

"This important global treaty is supported by the business community, environmental groups and public health advocates," says Kristin Schafer, Program Coordinator for Pesticide Action Network North America. "Years of hard work went into crafting the agreement, and the U.S. must ratify in a way that supports, rather than undermines the treaty."

The **Stockholm Convention aims for global elimination of a class of extremely dangerous chemicals**. POPs are carried long distances by wind and water, linger in the environment for years, and build up in the food chain and in our bodies. They can cause cancer and neurological harm, and can damage human developmental, reproductive, and immune systems. POPs released anywhere in the United States can harm people thousands of miles away, and POPs released in other countries threaten Americans here at home. The Stockholm Convention identifies twelve POPs for immediate action: DDT, aldrin, dieldrin, endrin, chlordane, heptachlor, hexachlorobenzene, mirex, toxaphene, polychlorinated biphenyls, dioxins, and furans. The treaty also creates an international scientific review process for adding other POPs to the list.

"This Convention is a vital agreement to protect the health of northern Indigenous peoples from exposure to contaminants that accumulate in our traditional foods and in our bodies," stated Shawna Larson, Environmental Justice Program Director with Alaska Community Action on Toxics and Indigenous Environmental Network. "We should not let politics get in the way of protecting the public health."

The **Solis bill would give states and other political jurisdictions the ability to regulate POPs chemicals *more stringently* than federal law, without needing EPA's approval**. The Gillmor TSCA bill would preempt and invalidate state standards on POPs chemicals added to the treaty once they become binding for the United States, jeopardizing the progress already made in many states. Implementing legislation should support state and local laws that safeguard public health and the environment from POPs.

"The world is moving ahead to tackle the threats that POPs pose to human health and the environment," says Daryl Ditz, Senior Policy Advisor with the Center for International Environmental Law. "The Solis bill recognizes the importance of United States cooperation in this effort, while the Gillmor bill seeks to hobble the EPA and undercut state progress."

Available for Interviews:

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