



Landmark Legislation Introduced to Protect the Health of American Families *Safe Chemicals Act Especially Important to Protect Alaskans*

For Immediate Release: April 15, 2010

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Coalition of 11 Million Supports Bill, Seeks Improvements before Enactment

(Anchorage, Alaska) Public health advocates in Alaska today applauded the introduction of federal legislation to protect families from harmful chemicals. The “Safe Chemicals Act of 2010,” introduced today by Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Congressmen Henry Waxman (D-CA) and Bobby Rush (D-IL), will overhaul federal regulation of the chemical industry for the first time in 34 years. Alaska Community Action on Toxics, a statewide non-profit public interest environmental health research and advocacy organization, strongly supports the federal legislation, but cautions that the bill needs further improvement in three critical areas.

“The Safe Chemicals Act offers a long overdue opportunity to fix our badly broken chemical safety system, which has failed to protect public health or keep up with the latest science,” said **Pam Miller, Executive Director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics**. “This national bill is particularly important to protect the most vulnerable populations, including children and women of child-bearing age, and for Alaskans who are exposed to chemicals that travel northward from more southerly latitudes and settle in the Arctic.”

“The Safe Chemicals Act goes a long way toward bringing chemical policy into the 21st century,” said **Andy Igrejas, National Campaign Director of Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families**. “We look forward to working with Congress to strengthen the bill to keep dangerous chemicals out of the marketplace.” Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families is a national coalition of 200 organizations representing more than 11 million people including parents, health professionals, advocates for learning and developmental disabilities, reproductive health advocates, environmentalists and businesses.

The Safe Chemicals Act proposes several essential reforms that would substantially improve public health protections, including:

- Require new health and safety information for all chemicals, eliminating the veil of secrecy used by the chemical industry to cover up toxic hazards;
- Require chemicals to meet a health-based safety standard that protects the most vulnerable, including the developing fetus and young children; and
- Identify ‘hot spot’ communities that are disproportionately impacted by toxic chemicals and create action plans to reduce that unjust burden on health.

Three serious shortcomings of the legislation, if not corrected, could perpetuate the failure of the current system to fully protect environmental public health:

- The proposed legislation makes it too difficult to get known dangerous chemicals off the market, such as Persistent Bioaccumulative and Toxic chemicals (PBTs) like lead and brominated flame retardants, by failing to give EPA clear authority to restrict them in favor of available safer alternatives;
- This bill makes it too easy to introduce new chemicals on the market without first demonstrating that they will not harm public health; and
- The bill fails to require EPA to use the most recent and best science to inform safety decisions as recommended by experts at the National Academy of Sciences.



“Children in Alaska and across our nation are being exposed to toxic chemicals found in many everyday products,” said **Patti Saunders, Development Director with the Arc of Anchorage**. “Exposure to these chemicals can impact the developing brain of the fetus, infant and young child with resulting lifelong learning problems. We’re urging Alaska’s Congressional Delegation to support the Safe Chemicals Act and ensure it’s an effective federal tool to complement our local safe product laws.”

Particular provisions in the bill mandate the EPA to develop action plans to reduce the disproportionately high exposures to toxic chemicals in some communities. “Indigenous Arctic communities are suffering the most from chemicals emitted in the lower 48 states,” said **Vi Waghiyi, St. Lawrence Island Yupik and Alaska Community Action on Toxics Environmental Health and Justice Program Director**. Because many industrial and commercial chemicals are long lasting and persistent in the atmosphere, they drift north on wind and water currents from where they are applied in Southern latitudes. “These chemicals from distant sources are in our traditional foods and are affecting the health of our people, especially the health of our children. We urge the State of Alaska and Alaska’s Congressional Delegation to support policy to regulate chemicals to end the ‘contamination without consent’ of our people from distant sources.”

Thirteen states have voiced their support through a statement of principles for reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)—Alaska is *not* currently among them. TSCA is the current federal law that regulates chemicals. In a letter sent to the Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Larry Hartig today, Alaska Community Action on Toxics urged public support from the State. “This bill would reduce the health threats posed by toxic chemicals,” said **Colleen Keane, Environmental Health and Justice Organizer with Alaska Community Action on Toxics**. “We are calling upon the Commissioner of DEC to join other states in support of this important legislation.”

The Safe Chemicals Act of 2010 would amend the federal Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 (TSCA). The current TSCA law is widely recognized as being ineffective. When TSCA passed, it ‘grandfathered in’ 62,000 chemicals that were currently in use without restriction or testing. In more than 30 years since then, the U.S. EPA has only required testing for 200 chemicals and only restricted some uses of five chemicals under TSCA. A growing body of science has documented widespread human exposure to toxic chemicals in everyday products, and has linked chemical exposure to threats of reduced fertility, learning disabilities, breast and prostate cancer, among other diseases.

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Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) is a statewide non-profit public interest environmental health research and advocacy organization dedicated to protecting environmental health and achieving environmental justice. Alaska Community Action on Toxics’ mission is: *to assure justice by advocating for environmental and community health. We believe that everyone has a right to clean air, clean water and toxic-free food.* We work to stop the production, proliferation, and release of toxic chemicals that may harm human health or the environment. www.akaction.org

Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families is a broad coalition of groups, including major environmental organizations like the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Defense Fund, health organizations like the Learning Disabilities Association, Breast Cancer Fund, and the Autism Society, health professionals and providers like the American Nurses Association, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and the Mt. Sinai Children’s Environmental Health Center, and concerned parents groups like the 1 million-member MomsRising. For more information and analysis of the Safe Chemicals Act, visit our website at www.saferchemicals.org.