

Toxic Chemicals and Brain Development

Neurotoxic Chemicals Found in Learning and Developmental Disabilities Community First-ever biomonitoring study on health affected community

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Contact: **Pam Miller**, Alaska Community Action on Toxics: (907) 222-7714 or pkmiller@akaction.net;
Ann WingQuest, Project Participant: (907) 830-6890

61 toxic chemicals found in human participants pose the question: What is the relationship between toxic chemicals and rising rates of autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and other learning and developmental disabilities?

(Anchorage, AK) In an innovative development that could transform the way Americans view the origins of learning and developmental disabilities, **Alaska Community Action on Toxics** and the national **Learning and Developmental Disabilities Initiative (LDDI)** released the first-ever biomonitoring report identifying toxic chemical pollution in people from the learning and developmental disability community. ***Mind, Disrupted: How Toxic Chemicals May Change How We Think and Who We Are*** examines 61 toxic chemicals present in project participants in the context of rising rates of autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and other learning and developmental disabilities.

The report was released in conjunction with today's Senate Hearing held at 10:00 a.m. EST. before the Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics and Environmental Health to examine current science on public exposures to toxic chemicals. (<http://epw.senate.gov/>)

In the U. S., 5-15% of children under age 18 are affected by learning and developmental disabilities. Reported cases of autism spectrum disorders have increased tenfold since the early 1990s. Based on current research, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) **states that 1 in 110 eight-year-old children have autism in the United States.**

Mind, Disrupted measured levels of a set of neurotoxic and endocrine-disrupting chemicals in the participants' bodies. A growing body of peer-reviewed scientific research, including animal and human studies, shows that these chemicals can disrupt the development and functioning of the brain and nervous system.

Alaska project participant, Ann WingQuest, a Individual Service Provider for the Arc of Anchorage, states, "I'm very sensitive to the fact that people with developmental disabilities have compromised systems, and introducing any kinds of toxins to their systems complicates everything. The current policy approach to dealing with our environment makes it clear that [when it comes to managing chemicals] we have no idea what we're doing. And that really concerns me."

"This report highlights the need for the Alaska State Legislature to make protective policy changes that prevent exposures to toxic chemicals that can damage the developing brains of children and harm adults as well," stated Pam Miller, Executive Director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics.

"Children are uniquely vulnerable to environmental exposures because their biological systems are still developing. During fetal development, exposures to even miniscule amounts of toxins at certain developmental windows can have lifelong health impacts," acknowledged **Larry Silver, M.D.**, author and a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at **Georgetown Medical Center**, accomplished self-advocate, and author of groundbreaking learning disabilities research. "By protecting children from toxic exposures, we can protect everyone. We need

to create healthy environments to ensure all children can reach their full potential and contribute to society.”

"All of us in the study had measurable levels of neurotoxic and endocrine disrupting chemicals in our bodies, regardless of how carefully we buy products for our families or food for our tables. I realize now more than ever why reforming our federal toxics law is absolutely essential to protecting our health, and our children's health. There is no way for any of us to avoid contamination on our own," explained **Maureen Swanson**, Healthy Children Project Coordinator, **Learning Disabilities Association of America**.

“Prevention of learning and developmental disabilities is both an individual and a community responsibility,” says **Stephen Boese**, MSW, from **Learning Disabilities Association of New York**. “However, current laws simply do not work, and have done virtually nothing to assure Americans that our everyday products are safe for use. The enormous rise in the incidence of these disabilities is coupled with a huge increase and proliferation of chemicals in everyday consumer products. These chemicals are largely untested for human safety and largely unknown to the public.”

Advocates from the learning and developmental disability community who have historically focused on access to care and equal rights are questioning the role of toxic chemical exposures on alarming increases in LDD diagnoses as well as individual negative health outcomes in people living with neurological disabilities.

“Given the increasing rates of learning and developmental disabilities-- particularly autism—we need to recognize that the rising costs associated with long term care of disability, special education and related health care will only continue to grow,” explained **Jeff Sell**, Esq. Vice President of Public Policy for the **Autism Society** and father of twin teen sons with autism, “The current health care debate suggests we need to do everything we can to decrease costs by taking preventative actions. Reducing environmental contributors to neurological problems will serve to save our families, communities and society significant expenses in the future and can only improve the quality of life for those with these disabilities.”

“About 16% of all children in the United States have a developmental disability, according to a 1994 study, and other research indicates this number is increasing,” says **Sharyle Patton**, **Director of the Commonwealth Biomonitoring Resource Center**. “Biomonitoring surveys conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control indicate that most Americans carry in their bodies measurable levels of environmental chemicals that have been linked to neurological harm in laboratory and human studies. Precaution would suggest that we limit exposures to these chemicals, starting immediately.”

For more information about the Learning and Developmental Disabilities Initiative and to view the report online, please visit www.minddisrupted.org.

For more information about the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Hearing please visit the committee website at <http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Home> <<http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Home>>

Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT)

www.akaction.org

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.