



Focus on Safer Chemical Alternatives



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The Problem:

- Businesses and homeowners sometimes spill or dump toxic chemicals, releasing these dangerous substances into our air, land, and water. Once released, these chemicals enter the food chain and threaten human health. Children, as their bodies grow and develop, are especially vulnerable.
- More than 80,000 chemicals are in use today, and we know very little about their impact on human health and the environment, either by themselves or in combination with one another. Federal law does not require chemical makers to provide this information. Many commonly used toxic chemicals continue to contaminate Washington's lands and waters.
- One approach to this problem is to give businesses and homeowners the information they need to replace these toxics with safer alternatives, eliminating the threat at its source. But when it comes to alternatives, information is hard to find.

The Solution:

Ecology and the Department of Health are proposing to work together to review, compile and analyze existing research on safer chemical alternatives. This will allow the agencies to work together to provide credible information about chemicals that are non- or less toxic than those they currently use such as the:

- Thousands of small and medium sized businesses in the state that likely use or generate hazardous wastes but have little or no toxics-reduction information;
- State agencies that also use or generate hazardous waste and could use their collective \$4 billion/year purchasing power to buy less or non toxic alternatives;
- Thousands of citizens who use Ecology's 1-800 hazardous substance information hotline looking for information on safer chemical alternatives.

The agencies are seeking \$500,000 with one FTE in Ecology and one half an FTE in Health in the 2007-2009 budget for this effort, with half from the State Toxics Control Account and half from the Hazardous Waste Assistance Account. This amount includes funds to acquire existing research data, reviewing and analyzing existing information on chemicals to determine their relative safety, and providing technical workshops and other education and outreach. Limited product testing may also be done. For example, in 2005, Ecology became aware of lunch boxes that might contain harmful levels of lead. Limited testing revealed this to be the case and the lunch boxes were pulled from the shelves.

Over the next two years, the project will:

- Identify alternatives for chemicals used in Washington state that are safer for human health and the environment.
- Provide expertise on chemical reduction and substitution to support efforts to reduce toxic loading to the urban waters projects in the Puget Sound and the Spokane River and otherwise reduce toxins at their source.
- Help businesses and state and local government with targeted technical assistance, training and workshops on safer alternatives to chemicals.

Without funding:

Toxic chemicals will continue to accumulate in Puget Sound, the Spokane River, and in other urban water bodies, creating new cleanup sites and recontaminating areas that have already been cleaned up, such as Tacoma's Commencement Bay. This will cost the state and its citizens more money in the long run.

The state's opportunity to more closely partner with local governments on reducing toxic threats will be lost.

The state will not be able to provide prevention help for businesses that are inadvertently contributing to pollution problems; toxic chemicals will continue to be mishandled in ways that cause unnecessary costs and burdens for them and avoidable impacts to the environment that could contribute to costly cleanups over time.

If you need this publication in an alternate format, please call Hazardous Waste and Toxics Reduction Program at (360) 407-6700. Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.