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“Body Burden” Study Reveals Toxic Chemicals in Michigan State Rep & Prominent Pediatrician

Pending Michigan bills would help stop these needless exposures

(October 8, 2009 — Lansing) The first national study of the toxic chemical “body burden” in health professionals found an array of hazardous chemicals in twenty doctors and nurses across the country, including state Representative Jimmy Womack, MD and the founder of MSU’s Department of Pediatrics, Dr. William Weil.

“One cannot live in the present environment without harboring a wide range of potentially harmful substances,” stated Dr Weil. “Avoiding serious exposure seems more a matter of chance than design. We need to clean up this entire chemical quagmire in order to protect everyone.”

Twenty health professionals from ten states were tested for selected hazardous chemicals stored in their bodies. Through a process known as biomonitoring, the doctors and nurses provided samples of blood and urine, which were tested for 62 different chemicals. These include:

- Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), found in electronics and furniture.
- Mercury, a byproduct of burning coal, also found in various medical devices and consumer products.
- Bisphenol A (BPA), found in polycarbonate (plastic) bottles and food and beverage can liners.
- Phthalates, endocrine disruptors found in plastics.
- Perfluorinated compounds (PFCs), found in coated pans and stain-repellent fabrics.
- Triclosan, a persistent chemical found in antibacterial hand soaps.

These chemicals are emerging or known chemicals of concern, are known or suspected of causing hormone problems, reproductive problems, neurological problems (including developmental, memory, learning, or behavioral issues), thyroid problems, cancer, diabetes and hypertension. Each participant had at least 24 individual chemicals in their body, and two participants had a high of 39 chemicals detected.

Representative Womack was the only participant to have all six PFCs and he had the highest total amount of PFCs of all participants. Additionally, Rep. Womack had 24 PBDEs (including deca-

BDE) – more than any other study participant. The study also found mercury, BPA, triclosan, and metabolites of six phthalates in Rep. Womack.

Dr. Weil’s results showed 18 PBDEs, three perfluorinated compounds, mercury, bisphenol A, and metabolites of all seven phthalates tested.

“The health care profession is asking whether we can reduce the prevalence of diseases by changing the way we manage chemicals,” explained Kristen Welker-Hood, ScD, MDN, RN, director of Environment and Health Programs, Physicians for Social Responsibility and co-principal investigator of the study. “Nurses and doctors volunteered for this study because they feel it is their responsibility to better understand how chemicals impact human health (and enter the body).”

“It was an honor to take part in a study that would help highlight the potential toxic exposure that comes from everyday living,” said State Rep. Womack, MD and MDiv.

Strong state legislation is proposed that would help alleviate the impacts of some of these chemicals. HB 4699 would phase out several uses of deca-BDE, the toxic flame retardant that is the only commercial formulation of PBDEs not yet banned in Michigan. Another bill, HB 4522, would limit children’s exposure to BPA.

The Michigan House has already passed 11 bills related to these chemicals that have not been moved in the Senate. HB 4763-69, the Children’s Safe Products Act, would provide consumers with the right-to-know about the presence of the most toxic chemicals in children’s products. This commonsense legislative package – which enjoys strong support from parents, health professionals and Michigan independent toy store owners and passed overwhelmingly in the House – is pending before the Senate Health Policy Committee. Similarly, bills HB 4277-81, which would limit mercury in products, are pending before the Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Environmental Affairs.

“The astonishing yet consistent findings of the study show the urgency with which the legislature should act to restrict toxic chemicals and provide consumers with the right-to-know about toxic toys,” said Sarah Mullkoff, the study’s state coordinator and Environmental Health Campaign Coordinator with Clean Water Action and the Michigan Network for Children’s Environmental Health. “We must keep dangerous chemicals off the shelves and empower parents to protect their children.”

“This study makes protecting Michiganders from needless exposures to toxic chemicals all the more urgent,” said Mike Shriberg, policy director for the Ecology Center and MI Network for Children’s Environmental Health. “Michigan must pass the Children’s Safe Products Act and legislation to restrict deca-BDE as soon as possible.”

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Physicians for Social Responsibility, in conjunction with Michigan partners Clean Water Action and the Michigan Network for Children’s Environmental Health, conducted the study. For a copy of the full report, please visit www.mnceh.org.