

# Daily Environment

January 17, 2008

## ***Toxic Substances: Inadequate Chemical Policies Cost California \$2.6 Billion, Report Says***

[http://coeh.berkeley.edu/docs/news/2008-17-1\\_de.pdf](http://coeh.berkeley.edu/docs/news/2008-17-1_de.pdf)

By Carolyn Whetzel

LOS ANGELES—Childhood and worker exposures to chemicals cost California an estimated \$2.6 billion in 2004, a University of California report scheduled for release Jan. 17 found.

Commissioned by the state, the report builds strong public health and economic cases for overhauling California's chemical policies. Its release comes as the California Department of Toxic Substances Control puts the finishing touches on a report to the governor recommending a menu of green chemistry policies.

In 2004, occupational chemical exposure cost California insurers, employers, workers, and the workers' families \$1.4 billion in direct medical costs and indirect costs, such as lost wages and benefits, the report concluded. About 240,000 cases of preventable childhood diseases in California were linked to environmental exposure to hazardous substances, costing another \$1.2 billion in direct and indirect costs, the report said.

*Green Chemistry: Cornerstone to a Sustainable California* echoes a 2006 UC legislative report in calling for a comprehensive state policy to identify the most hazardous chemicals and promote use of safer alternatives (50 DEN A-14, 3/15/06).

Like the earlier report, the latest UC report contends federal laws and existing state policies do not adequately protect the public and environment from hazardous chemicals.

Not enough information is being disclosed about the potential health and environmental hazards of thousands of chemicals, the report said. As a result, public agencies are unable "to efficiently gather hazard information; proactively regulate for known hazards; or require producers to accept greater responsibility for the lifecycle impacts of their products," the report said.

New Approach Needed. The report also found that current chemical laws and policies do not promote "public and private investment in green chemistry research, development, education, and technical assistance."

“A fresh approach to chemicals policy in California is essential to building a modern, vibrant economy while safeguarding human health and the environment,” it said.

Prepared by the UC Berkeley and Los Angeles Centers for Occupational and Environmental Health, the report called for new laws that would close the data gap on the toxicity of chemicals.

Specifically, the report recommended policies that would:

- require chemical producers and distributors and product manufacturers to report hazard and tracking data;
- set up an independent panel to define and keep updated hazard traits;
- establish the best available toxicity testing methods and support research and development of new methods;
- require chemical producers to reimburse taxpayers for the costs of managing chemicals;
- address known hazards; and
- develop lists of substances, categorized by their relative hazards and their threat to vulnerable populations.

California Can Be National Leader. California’s success and leadership in promoting clean technologies to reduce air pollution, increase energy efficiency, and address climate change position the state to become a national leader in chemical management policies, the report said.

“This report, for the first time, puts cost estimates on the consequences for Californians of current chemical and product management policies,” Dr. John Balmes, director of Berkeley’s Center for Occupational and Environmental Health (COEH), said in a written statement.

“California has shown that creating new jobs and investment opportunities can go hand in hand with protecting human health and the environment. We have been doing this with vehicle emissions and energy use, and this report makes it obvious that we will need to do the same with chemicals and products.”

American Chemistry Council spokeswoman Tiffany Harrington told BNA Jan. 16 that the organization could not comment on the findings or the recommendations because it had not yet reviewed the UC report.

Toxics Leaking Into Groundwater. The report also cited DTSC data showing that 61 of the state’s 85 largest hazardous waste sites are leaking toxics into groundwater.

Nearly 1 million California women of childbearing age have blood mercury levels that exceed what the Environmental Protection Agency considers safe for fetal

development, and biomonitoring studies have found more than 100 synthetic chemicals and pollutants in breast milk, umbilical cord blood, and other bodily fluids and tissues, the report said.

With global chemical production expected to increase, health problems from environmental pollution are likely to grow, the report predicted.

“It is timely for California to reduce the use of toxic agents through innovative technological approaches available through green chemistry,” John Froines, director of UCLA’s COEH, said in a written statement.

“New policies that prevent hazards rather than cleaning up problems after the fact will foster innovation and help green chemistry emerge as a central part of our economy.”

Last May, California Environmental Protection Agency Secretary Linda Adams directed DTSC to develop the report to evaluate the state’s existing programs and work with other agencies and stakeholders to come up with a list of policy options to reduce and eliminate the use of toxic chemicals in consumer products to avoid having to manage hazardous substances at the end of a product’s life cycle (87 DEN A-10, 5/7/07).

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Green Chemistry: Cornerstone to a Sustainable California  
*is available at <http://www.coeh.ucla.edu/greenchemistry.htm> or <http://coeh.berkeley.edu/greenchemistry/briefing>.*