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California Chemicals: State should adopt incentives, regulations to stimulate green chemistry economy

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By Cheryl Hogue

California needs to overhaul its regulation of commercial substances and foster a sustainable chemicals sector, says a report released last week by University of California researchers.

The state should take this action because diseases attributed to chemical exposure among children and workers cost insurers, businesses, and families in California some \$2.6 billion each year in direct and indirect expenses, the report says.

The report recommends that chemical manufacturers disclose hazard information on their products as a condition of use or sale in California. This will allow businesses, consumers, and public agencies to choose among competing products for "viable alternatives" that provide the greatest protection of human health and the environment, it says. The report calls for the state to develop technical criteria that will define attributes of a chemical or industrial process that makes it a safer alternative.

Chemical makers should provide data on product sales, volume, and distribution; industrial and consumer uses; environmental releases; and disposal practices, the report continues. This information would allow state regulators to estimate the potential for human exposure to commercial substances.

The report also recommends that the state categorize commercial chemicals according to their relative hazards. California regulators would then focus their attention on substances of greatest concern to the health of vulnerable populations including pregnant women, children, and workers.

In addition, the report calls for state-funded research on green chemistry and for public agencies and universities to provide technical assistance.

It also recommends that California offer financial incentives to industry. These include tax credits for companies with health and environmental performance that goes beyond standard industry practice, low-interest loans for investment in green technologies, and a state procurement policy favoring preferred chemicals and products.

John R. Ulrich, executive director of the [Chemical Industry Council of California](#), says chemical companies in the state support development and advancement of green technologies. But providing all the data called for in the report for all commercial substances at the same time would be "an impossible task," he says.

Richard A. Denison, senior scientist for [Environmental Defense](#), an activist group, says the recommendations in the report are novel because they are designed to empower players other than the state government—specifically industry and consumers—to address chemical risks and to choose safer alternatives.

The [California Environmental Protection Agency](#) commissioned the UC Berkeley and UCLA Centers for Occupational & Environmental Health to prepare the report. The document is available at www.coeh.ucla.edu/greenchemistry.htm.

Numbers Snapshot:

California spends billions of dollars each year in health care costs due to chemical exposures. These figures are for 2004.

- **208,000** new cases of chronic disease attributable to workplace chemical exposures.
- **4,400** premature deaths from disease attributable to workplace chemical exposures.
- **\$1.4 billion** in direct and indirect costs of workplace diseases and deaths attributable to chemical exposures.
- **\$1.2 billion** in direct and indirect costs of childhood diseases attributable to chemical exposures.

SOURCE: University of California