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State to probe development of 'green' chemicals: Experts are unveiling ideas for a state effort to develop and use 'green' substitutes for toxic compounds.

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By Marla Cone, Staff Writer

In an effort to reduce industry's reliance on toxic compounds, state environmental officials today will lay out a framework for transforming California into a leader in the development and use of "green" chemicals.

The proposals are an attempt to change the approach to environmental health from a chemical-by-chemical squabble to a wholesale shift in the way industry manufactures compounds used in products as varied as prescription drugs, plastic food packaging, pesticides, cosmetics and household cleaners.

State officials today will unveil the initial ideas for spurring innovation that could lead to nontoxic substitutes for many of the thousands of chemicals on which industries rely. The strategy, if adopted, would be the first in the nation.

About 80,000 compounds are used commercially in the United States, and many are polluting the water and air, accumulating in human bodies, spreading globally in the environment and harming wildlife. For nearly all of them, the effects on human health are unknown.

The report by the state Department of Toxic Substances Control will list 818 ideas to be considered. Detailed recommendations are expected to be sent to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in July.

"The goal is to blast California way ahead of the world," said Maureen Gorsen, director of the Department of Toxic Substances Control. "We're trying to develop an entirely new state policy framework to move California to a . . . sustainable society. No government's ever done that."

Linda Adams, secretary of the state Environmental Protection Agency, initiated the effort in April by authorizing Gorsen's department to collect ideas for promoting "green chemistry." Eight months of blogging, forums and other attempts to solicit

ideas from business leaders, scientists, environmentalists and academic experts followed.

The state's initiative was spurred by a UC Berkeley report in March that said the United States had fallen behind in protecting people and the environment from toxic chemicals. The report, commissioned by the Legislature, encouraged California to act in the wake of weak federal regulations.

Among eight recommendations considered fundamental is changing the state's procurement process to take into account the environmental effects and "life cycle" costs when contracts are awarded and products purchased. For example, this could lead to the purchase of more alternative-fuel vehicles.

Another key recommendation is to expand state programs for helping businesses prevent pollution.

Other priorities include training new scientists at state universities to design safer chemicals and developing a curriculum to introduce the concepts in schools.

The state's list does not include new bans or other restrictions on chemicals. But three of the fundamental policies involve creating a new regulatory and enforcement system, strengthening consumer protection laws and better informing consumers about toxic substances in products.

"These foundational recommendations are a good start," said Michael Wilson, a research scientist at UC Berkeley's Center for Occupational and Environmental Health who was the lead author of the report that spurred the state effort.

But Wilson warned that state officials would need political will to make necessary changes. He said five of the eight recommendations would require little effort by chemical and product manufacturers, even though his reports "clearly point out that manufacturers will need to shoulder much more responsibility."

Environmental leaders say that California needs to overhaul its laws and policies, and that until that happens, they will keep lobbying the Legislature to ban many chemicals in consumer products, particularly those used by children.

"Right now, it still needs teeth," said Dan Jacobson, legislative director of Environment California. "We applaud the process, but there's not enough detail in there to applaud the policy," he said.

"These proposals aren't going to reduce people's exposures to dangerous chemicals. In the summer, when this goes to the governor, they are going to have to come out and say we need programs that phase out dangerous chemicals."

Chemical industry representatives have encouraged government grants, training,

awards and other support of green chemistry but say mandatory replacement of chemicals is foolhardy because it limits choices for consumers and industries and could lead to riskier substitutes.

Exposure to toxic compounds is costing Californians an estimated \$2.6 billion a year in medical expenses for cancer, asthma and other diseases and lost wages, according to the report by Wilson and other UC Berkeley and UCLA researchers.

marla.cone@latimes.com