

Excerpts from a 50 page Safer Products Project entitled “Sick of Dust”.

“...It seems to me that if you wait until all the frogs have croaked their last to take some action, you’ve missed the point...” R.P. Riger

The study documents a range of hazardous chemicals found in household dust in 70 homes in seven states.

To investigate the presence of hazardous chemicals in common house dust we took dust samples from vacuum bags in ten homes in each of seven states (California, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Oregon and Washington) to analyze for six classes of well known hazardous chemicals.

Recommended Actions: States should take strong action now to phase out chemicals with known or likely hazards. A number of states are currently considering bans on the toxic flame retardants PBDE's which have been found in house dust as well as breast milk.

Once upon a time, household dust was just a nuisance. In a pinch, it was swept under the rug. No more. Today house dust is a toxic menace. House dust is a time capsule of chemical contaminants that come into the home. Since most people spend about 69-90 percent of their time indoors, there is ample opportunity for frequent and prolonged exposure to the dust and its load of contaminants.

A study in the Seattle area found that children spent 66 percent of their time indoors at home and 21 percent indoors away from home, while the elderly spent 83-88 percent of their time indoors at home. No wonder house dust is an important pathway of toxic exposures especially for children whose risk from dust-borne contaminants may be 40 times higher than that of adults. As they play and crawl on the floor, children may take in five times as much dust while their immature organs and immune system make them more vulnerable to toxic insults.

During exposure in newborn mice PBDEs have been shown to distribute throughout the body and concentrate in the brain. They induce developmental neurotoxic effects in adult mice that worsen with age and lead to abnormal behavior.

But whatever the combination of causes, the fact is that many disabilities such as asthma, and attention deficit disorder are increasing among our children.

ASTHMA is the second most prevalent chronic condition among children. It results in 14 million days of missed school each year. In 1980, 3.6% of children had asthma. By 1995, the prevalence had increased to 7.5%, or approximately 5 million children.

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD) is the most commonly diagnosed childhood psychiatric disorder in the United States. Recent evidence suggests the prevalence may be as high as 17% for all school children. In effect, the US has seen a 6-fold increase in ADHD between the years 1985 and 2000. The use of Ritalin, a stimulant widely prescribed to treat hyperactivity and attention deficits, has increased from 2.5 times to 5 times between 1990 and 1995. By 2000 it was estimated that 15% of school age children, or an estimated 8 million children, use Ritalin.

The degree to which these trends can be linked to hazardous chemicals exposure is not the main issue. The real question is why should we take chances?

“...It seems to me that if you wait until all the frogs have croaked their last to take some action, you’ve missed the point..” R.P. Riger