



AFT members teach, work and live in communities—urban and rural—that are **burdened with persistent toxic chemicals**. These substances are in the water we drink and in the air we breathe. They're in the products we use every day. **And our children may be paying for these chemicals with their health and cognitive development.**



# The Cost of Chemicals

*Are Children Paying with their health?*



*A Union of Professionals*

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Asthma. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Aggressive behaviors. Developmental delays. These are just a few of the health and behavior issues educators see every day, and they have AFT members concerned about the way our country regulates toxic chemicals. Scientific studies have linked each of these conditions to chemicals in our air, food and water, and in the products we use, and the scientific evidence connecting toxic chemicals and developmental disorders and diseases keeps getting stronger. However, the laws that are supposed to protect the American people from these chemicals are stuck back in the 1970s and are preventing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from taking action to protect our health and the health of our nation's children.

The main law that is supposed to regulate chemicals is the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA, pronounced "tosca"). When the law was passed in 1976, TSCA was supposed to give the EPA the power to "regulate chemical substances and mixtures which present an unreasonable risk of injury to health or the environment." But, from the beginning, TSCA has been ineffective.

Soon after TSCA became law, the EPA used its provisions to ban five chemicals: PCBs, chloro-fluorocarbons, dioxins, asbestos and hexavalent chromium. But the law grandfathered in more than 60,000 chemicals without requiring that their manufacturers show that they were safe. And in response to a legal challenge, the federal courts overturned the EPA's authority to restrict asbestos. That 1991 decision and the TSCA provision that grandfathered in so many chemicals combine to make TSCA incapable of protecting our health and our environment.

In the absence of federal protections, local and state governments have passed laws to minimize exposures to chemicals of concern. Between 2002 and 2013, 20 states passed more than 100 chemical safety laws. Many of these laws were focused on specific chemicals, often with an emphasis on children's exposure to potential toxins. Four states—California, Maine, Minnesota and Washington—have adopted more comprehensive chemical management laws. In Washington, for example, manufacturers must report on the presence of toxic chemicals in children's products they sell inside the state.

Some leading companies are also trying to fill the vacuum with their own chemical management policies. From architecture firms like Perkins+Will, to household product companies like S. C. Johnson, to healthcare organizations like Kaiser Permanente, downstream users of chemicals are trying to make and use safe products in the absence of protective federal regulations.

Until he died in 2013, Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) was a champion of TSCA reform. Every year, Sen. Lautenberg and other Democrats in the House and Senate would introduce bills that would give the EPA the authority to regulate toxic chemicals and to protect public health. However, in 2013, Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) was the primary author of a bipartisan bill, the Chemical Safety

Improvement Act, that will not give the EPA the authority it needs to protect our children and will strip states of their power to regulate chemicals.

To reclaim the promise of safe and healthy communities, we need stronger laws to protect our health from toxic chemicals. That's why the AFT passed a resolution in 2010 to "work in coalition with other key stakeholders, including labor unions, the Blue-Green Alliance, environmental organizations and persons with disabilities, to advocate for genuine TSCA reform."

Your state and federal legislators need to hear that chemical policy reform matters to you. You can help by distributing this joint publication of the American Federation of Teachers and the BlueGreen Alliance.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on how to get involved in what the AFT and the other 13 labor and environmental partners of the BlueGreen Alliance are doing together to win stronger chemical policies, visit [www.bluegreenalliance.org](http://www.bluegreenalliance.org).

- For additional information about federal reform, go to [www.saferchemicals.org](http://www.saferchemicals.org), the website for the Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families coalition.
- If you would like to know more about what your state may be doing to regulate chemicals, and for opportunities to get involved, visit [www.saferstates.org](http://www.saferstates.org), a network of diverse environmental health coalitions and organizations in states around the country.
- For daily news on how toxics in the environment are impacting children and adults, visit [www.environmentalhealthnews.org](http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org).

