

“Green Chemistry” is Good News For **WORKING PEOPLE**

Green Chemistry is the design of chemical products and processes that reduce or eliminate the use and generation of hazardous substances. Fewer hazardous substances means less hazardous waste and a healthier environment.

Working around toxic chemicals can be hazardous to your health and the health of your family.

Here’s why: Many chemicals known to cause cancer and/or birth defects are still used in California workplaces. Some of these chemicals are organic solvents, some are pesticides, and some are metals. Some are ingredients in other products and mixtures

Q That’s a lot to sort out. Is there a common thread here?

A. Yes. Its “legal” to be exposed to chemicals that are known to cause cancer and birth defects. Legal limits for exposure to toxics at work are much weaker than they are in the environment. (like speed limits of 25,000 mph when we all know that sticking to 25 mph or less is what it takes to prevent serious injuries.)

Q. Has anybody shown that workers actually get sick from these exposures?

A. Studies of disease rates show that regular, long-term exposure to organic solvents at work can raise your risk for many diseases including non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, leukemia, multiple myeloma, brain cancer, kidney cancer, multiple sclerosis. Studies on causes of death among workers exposed to chemicals paint a grim picture too.

Q. What about workers’ families?

A. Many studies document that pregnant workers exposed to organic solvents face increased rates of miscarriage compared to background rates. A number of studies of children born with severe birth defects indicate that exposure to organic solvents at work during pregnancy can contribute to birth defects and developmental problems in offspring.

Q. What kinds of good changes could Green Chemistry mean for working people?

A. Here are some changes that Green Chemistry could bring about for working people.

- *Step One:* Better information together with better, stronger controls over exposure to toxics used today in the workplace.
- *Step Two:* Phase out these toxic materials altogether and replace them with non-toxic alternatives so that you don’t have to risk your health, or your family’s health, for a job.
- *Step Three:* Free medical surveillance for already-exposed workers since early detection of chronic illness can make the difference between life and death. Provide cost-of-care without costly, protracted fights.

...Compare this reality to what we have now...