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Children's lung and brain development most at risk from toxic substances, report finds

(Toronto, ON) June 30, 2004 — The Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) and Pollution Probe have released a new shortlist of Canadian “substances of concern” for children's health.

The new report classifies toxic substances in lists that make it easier to understand the substances' effects on children's health. Where possible, it indicates the health effects of these substances according to level of exposure, noting that exposure data are very limited.

The study revealed that the greatest risk to children appears to be from chemicals that affect their lungs and developing brains. Life stages of greatest concern are the developing fetus and early infancy. Women of childbearing age and pregnant women are among the at-risk population. Air pollution, including indoor air and dust, and consumer goods, appear to be key exposure sources.

“People should note that of the over 23,000 substances in commercial use in Canada, full toxicological evaluations have been conducted on only a fraction,” says project researcher, Kathleen Cooper. “Canada has made some progress but government and industry still manage substances largely as separate items, with detailed evaluations and a high degree of proof of harm needed before taking regulatory action. We still know very little about many of the chemicals that are released and we know even less about the exposure impacts they have.”

The Canadian Environmental Protection Act, which governs toxic substances, is scheduled for review in 2005, and a new Canadian Health Protection Act is proposed for 2006.

“We need to look at more efficient ways to get through the backlog of chemicals that have not been evaluated. Decisions are necessary to more strictly regulate or phase-out entire groups of hazardous substances, particularly those suspected of harming brain development,” Ken Ogilvie, executive director of Pollution Probe said.

The report is available on-line at www.cela.ca and www.pollutionprobe.org/Publications/Childrens.htm.

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