

**Center for Health, Environment and Justice
Citizens' Environmental Coalition**

NEWS RELEASE

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**New York City Council Passes Legislation to Reduce Purchase of
Products Containing PVC, Lead, Mercury, Toxic Flame
Retardants, & Other Toxic Chemicals**

***City Uses Enormous \$11 Billion Purchasing Power to Drive Markets
for Safer, Environmentally Friendly Products***

(New York, NY) Today the New York City Council passed legislation that will reduce the City's purchase of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic, Lead, Mercury, Toxic Flame Retardants, and other hazardous products, wielding its \$11 billion annual purchasing budget to drive markets for safer, environmentally friendly products. The council passed Int. 544-A, Int. 534-A, Int. 536-A, Int. 545-A and Int. 552-A., a package of environmentally preferable purchasing bills.

"We applaud members of the New York City Council for recognizing the growing public health and environmental threats posed by products like PVC, the poison plastic," said Lois Gibbs, the housewife-turned-activist who led the community effort to relocate hundreds of families away from the infamous Love Canal toxic waste site, and who went on to found the Center for Health, Environment and Justice. "This new legislation is a major victory for the health of millions of New Yorkers. When produced or burned, PVC may lead to the formation of dioxins, known to cause cancer and other health threats."

"Given that over 90% of all persistent, bioaccumulative toxic chemicals leave manufacturing facilities, not into the air, water, or soil, but in products, this is a truly intelligent, forward-thinking contribution to the global shift away from the use of dangerous, unnecessary chemicals," said Karl Breyman of Citizens' Environmental Coalition. "This enormous market shift will help create an 'economy of scale' that will make safer products more available and affordable for everyone. Innovation in healthy materials is a profitable reality," added Breyman.

The bills that were passed today include:

- Int. 544-A: Reduces the purchase of products containing hazardous substances. This includes products such as PVC that lead to the formation of dioxins, mercury-added lamps, toxic flame retardants, mercury, and other toxic materials in electronics.
- Int. 534-A: Creates an office of environmental purchasing to develop and implement environmental purchasing standards to reduce the purchase of persistent bioaccumulative and toxic (PBT) chemicals, improve indoor air quality, decrease greenhouse gas emissions, etc.

- Int. 536-A: Purchases more energy efficient products such as computers and lamps.
- Int. 545-A: Increases the purchase of products with recycled content.
- Int. 552-A: Reduces the purchase of toxic cleaning and other custodial products to protect workers.

New York City joins a growing list of cities such as Boston, Seattle, San Francisco, and Buffalo who have passed purchasing policies to reduce the purchase of products such as PVC that lead to the formation of persistent toxic chemicals (PBTs).

PVC is the worst plastic from an environmental health perspective, dangerous throughout its entire life cycle of production, use and disposal. Consumers can identify it by looking for the number “3”, “PVC” or the letter “V” inside or underneath the universal recycling symbol. In addition, soft flexible PVC products often have a distinct odor, such as vinyl shower curtains.

PVC poses a great risk to firefighters and building occupants in building fires, as it releases deadly gases long before it ignites, such as hydrogen chloride which turns to hydrochloric acid when inhaled. When produced or burned, PVC plastic releases dioxins, the most potent synthetic chemicals ever tested, which can cause cancer and harm the immune and reproductive systems. Studies have shown plasticizers such as phthalates have migrated out of PVC consumer products, exposing people to toxic additives linked to reproductive defects and other health problems. Our bodies are contaminated with toxic chemicals released during the PVC lifecycle, such as mercury, dioxins, and phthalates, which may pose life-long health threats.

PVC cannot be effectively recycled due to the many toxic additives used to soften or stabilize PVC, which can contaminate the recycling batch. In fact, just one PVC bottle can contaminate a recycling load of 100,000 PET bottles. Safer, cost effective alternatives are readily available for virtually every use of PVC. From safer plastics, to bio-based materials, there is a growing market for substitutes for hazardous PVC products. In the past year, Microsoft, Johnson and Johnson, Crabtree & Evelyn, Wal-Mart, HP, Kaiser Permanente, and Catholic Healthcare West, Firestone Building Products, and Shaw Industries announced policies to phase out the use of PVC in their products or packaging.

Mercury, a heavy metal, is a persistent toxic chemical that already contaminates many lakes and streams in New York. Because it builds up as it moves up the food chain, many large fish are so contaminated that children and women of childbearing age should not eat them at all. Mercury can severely damage learning and brain development in exposed fetuses, infants and children. It can also harm the spinal cord, kidneys and liver. A study by Mt. Sinai School of Medicine's Center for Children's Health found that the U.S. loses \$8.7 billion a year due to the impact of mercury on children's brain development. The NYS Department of Health has issued scores of fish consumption advisories warning NY anglers to limit or eliminate their consumption of certain fish due to mercury contamination.

Mercury is added to numerous consumer, commercial, industrial, and medical products, and can be released to the environment during various stages of the product life cycle including production, transportation, use, and disposal. For example, mercury blood-pressure gauges can break, releasing mercury to the environment and potentially reaching dangerous levels in indoor air. Mercury-containing products are often improperly disposed of, resulting in mercury emissions from trash incinerators and landfills. Fortunately, there are safe, available, cost-effective replacements for most mercury-containing products. For example, 91% of chain pharmacies and the top ten largest pharmacy chains in the United States have stopped selling

mercury fever thermometers. In addition, numerous states including New York, Washington, Michigan, Connecticut, and Maine have all enacted laws to restrict or ban the sale and/or distribution of mercury containing products. More than 1,400 health care facilities in the U.S. have pledged to become mercury-free.

Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) are toxic flame retardants used in consumer products such as computers, furniture and mattresses, carpeting and electronics. They are released from these products and found in dust in homes and offices. Humans are exposed through inhaling such dust. PBDEs persist in the environment and build up in our bodies. Studies show PBDE body burdens are doubling every 2.5 years, with American women having the highest breast milk levels in the world.

PBDEs are linked to negative effects on neurological development and thyroid function, leading to impaired intelligence and motor skills. Laboratory tests of animals exposed to PBDEs found tumors of the liver, thyroid, and pancreas. PBDE is considered a possible human carcinogen, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency. Burning of PBDEs releases dioxins and furans, which cause health effects at minute levels. Fortunately, there are safe, available, cost-effective replacements for most polybrominated diphenyl ethers, such as the use of phosphate type flame retardants, inherently flame resistant fiber or non-woven barriers, and product redesign to eliminate the fire load. Many electronics' firms have already eliminated or committed to eliminating PBDEs, including Philips, Electrolux, Sony, Dell, Intel, Apple and Hewlett Packard.

The Center for Health, Environment and Justice is a national environmental organization that leads national campaigns on PVC, precautionary action, children's environmental health, and provides people with technical information and organizing training to protect their communities from environmental contaminants. Citizens' Environmental Coalition is New York State's leading Environmental Health organization working at the grassroots, state and national levels toward a future in which children are born without toxic chemicals in their bodies.

For more information on the hazards of PVC, log onto www.besafenet.com/pvc.htm

For more information on the availability of safer, cost- and performance-effective products, log onto www.safer-products.org