



CHINTAN
Environmental Research
and Action Group

FACT SHEET

Toxics

What are toxics?

Toxic chemicals or toxic products are substance with the ability (or property) to produce harmful or lethal effects on humans and/or the environment during their life cycles (Toxic in nature).

Toxic substances around us:

Our homes seem to be havens of safety, security and comfort. What if you find out that our little havens are nothing but an illusion, that in every room there may be a disaster waiting to happen, danger lurking every moment? Take a look around your house and see what really lies there.

1. **Not so innocent toys made of PVC:** Many Indian toys made of plastics comprise PVC plastic, which requires the addition of a high degree of phthalates to make them flexible. However, phthalates are loosely bound with the plastic and are released easily. Phthalates are additives (type of chemicals) that are a reproductive poison, growth retardant and suppress the immune system. These chemicals enter the human body when children come in contact with them and chew on them, etc.

2. **In-credible beauty products:** Perfumed soaps and cosmetics also contain phthalates that help keep the perfume smelling strongly for a longer period. Phthalates are a reproductive poison and are particularly dangerous for children. We need to use the least perfumed products in our everyday use.

3. **Sinister pesticides / insecticides:** used for many purposes, from killing cockroaches and rats at home to looking after household plants. These may get mixed with water and food, and accumulate in our bodies for years. They affect children in particular. Associated health problems include allergies, respiratory disorders, reproductive disorders, endocrine and immune system malfunctioning and cancers.

- It has been reported that childhood cancer rates in India are increasing by 6% per year. This may be linked in some cases to pesticides.

- That this is a crucial issue is evident from the fact that Indians have some of the highest amounts of 'Dichloro Diphenyl Trichloroethane' (DDT) in their bodies, in the world. It is therefore not surprising that the government of India has now banned the use of DDT.

4. **Heavy metals:** Lead and cadmium: These are found in NiCad batteries, paints and coloured plastic bags. Both lead and cadmium are very poisonous. Cadmium is a nephrotoxic and has a negative impact on the functioning of kidneys. Lead is a neurotoxic and thus makes a child's learning process slower. Cadmium is used as a colorant for plastic and is present with Nickel in Ni-cad batteries. Lead is used as the outer paint on pencils, which children routinely chew on. Plastic bags contain lead and cadmium based pigments, which are known to leach out. It is for this reason that the coloured plastic bags are considered to be health hazards. Ninety percent of paints found in Indian market contain lead because it is 10 times cheaper than lead-free paints.

- Yellow colour has abnormally high lead level (4mg per square cm) followed by green (1mg). Brown, orange and red also have high lead levels.

Mercury is a well-known poison and affects the nervous system. It can also lead to liver and kidney problems. Mercury can be absorbed through skin and cause allergic reactions. It can also cause severe renal and gastrointestinal toxicity. Mercury has also been known to be the cause of developmental disorders in growing foetus. Mercury is found in tube lights and mercury thermometers at home. When these thermometers break, the mercury, which looks like pearls and easily vaporises, is dumped into the bin. Residual mercury also remains on the floor, where children studying or playing can absorb it.

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