



Children's
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Pediatric and Respiratory Experts Critical of US EPA's Design for the Environment Fragrance Decision

WASHINGTON DC – Public health experts are concerned about the recent decision of the U.S. EPA's green chemistry program, Design for the Environment (DfE), to allow fragrances in DfE-endorsed cleaning products. One national program has withdrawn its recommendation that parents and other caregivers look for the DfE label.

The DfE program recently began allowing DfE-endorsed products to contain fragrances. Of the first 119 fragrance chemicals okayed for use, 93 have "hazard profile issues" such as being known sensitizers or lacking vital data.

Independent science- and health-based groups including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Lung Association expressed concern about this decision in a letter sent today to U.S. EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy.

"This is a serious misstep and does not protect children's health," said Cynthia Bearer, M.D., Ph.D., CEHN Board Chair and Cobey Professor of Neonatology at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. "Children, because of their sensitive developing systems, should be protected from unnecessary chemical exposures. This is especially important for the one in ten children with asthma. A parent or caregiver may see the DfE logo and not know that the product may contain an unnecessary and potentially-harmful chemical."

"It is standard practice among allergists and environmental health practitioners to discourage the use of air fresheners, scented products, and fragrances in homes and other indoor spaces," said Dr. Michael LeNoir, a pediatrician, allergist and President of the National Medical Association.

As a result of DfE's decision, the Eco-Healthy Child Care® program (EHCC), a national program promoting environmental health best practices in child care, with more than 2,200 participating child care providers, has withdrawn its recommendation that providers and other caregivers look for the DfE logo on products.

Researchers, pediatricians, and other health experts agree that "Scented chemicals increase risk that some per cent of exposed people will have allergic and hypersensitivity reactions. Allergic and asthmatic children are at especially high risk," as the letter noted.

EPA itself has noted that, “for many people, the risks to health may be greater due to exposure to air pollution indoors than outdoors” because “the air within homes and other buildings can be more seriously polluted than the outdoor air in even the largest and most industrialized cities.”

According to the letter, “The EPA should . . . be promoting practices that decrease exposure to asthmagens, substances that may serve as sensitizers, and any chemical that may contribute to poor indoor air quality.”

The groups also noted that “fragrances play no role in the effectiveness of cleaning products. Such artificial suppression of other odors may even mask the continuation of an unsanitary condition after cleaning.”

In addition to asking the Agency to reverse this decision, the groups also urged that the DfE program consult more with the EPA’s Office of Children’s Health Protection in its work, and that McCarthy assure that the Agency’s long-standing policy directive on children’s environmental health is being applied to all Agency activities, including the DfE program.

Other letter signers included the American Thoracic Society, the National Medical Association, and the Children’s Environmental Health Network (CEHN).

CEHN is a national non-profit whose mission is to protect the developing child from environmental hazards and promote a healthy environment, advised by independent internationally-recognized experts in children’s environmental health science. CEHN oversees the Eco-Healthy Child Care® program (EHCC), which promotes science-based environmental health best practices in child care.