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New Report on Toxic Chemicals in Kids' Products: Hidden Toxic Chemicals Linked to Asthma and Birth Defects Found in Children's "Back-to-School" Supplies

*Laboratory Tests Reveal Levels Higher Than Deemed Safe in Toys
New Guide to Safer Products Released*

(New York, NY) **A brand new report reveals that toxic chemicals linked to asthma and birth defects that are banned in toys were found to be widespread in children's vinyl back-to-school supplies.**

Seventy-five percent of children's school supplies tested in a laboratory had elevated levels of toxic phthalates, including popular Disney, Spiderman, and Dora branded school supplies such as vinyl lunchboxes, backpacks, 3-ring binders, raincoats, and rainboots. *Hidden Hazards: Toxic Chemicals Inside Children's Vinyl Back-to-School Supplies* was released in New York City today outside of Kmart, where some of the school supplies were purchased.

"Our investigation found elevated levels of toxic phthalates widespread in children's school supplies, including Disney and Spider-Man lunchboxes and backpacks. These dangerous chemicals manufactured by Exxon Mobil have no place in our children's school supplies. Unfortunately, while phthalates have been banned in children's toys, similar safeguards don't yet exist to keep them out of lunchboxes, backpacks and other children's school supplies. It's time for Congress to move forward and pass the Safe Chemicals Act to protect our children from toxic exposure," says **Mike Schade** from the **Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ)**, author of the new report, *Hidden Hazards: Toxic Chemicals Inside Children's Vinyl Back-to-School Supplies*. CHEJ collaborated on the report with the **Empire State Consumer Project**.

"It is disturbing that millions of young children are being exposed to these toxic chemicals with no enforcement to protect them," said **Judy Braiman** of the **Empire State Consumer Project**, co-publisher of the report.

The **Honorable Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY)** was at the new report's release event, and says, "School supplies are supposed to help our children with their education, they shouldn't be harming their health. We don't allow high levels of these toxic chemicals in children's toys and we certainly shouldn't allow them in back-to-school products. When kids take their lunch to school this fall, they shouldn't be carrying it in a lunchbox laden with anything other than a nutritious meal, packed by mom." Senator Schumer is a co-sponsor of the Safe Chemicals Act, new legislation that would reform our nation's broken chemical safety system. Senator Schumer also sent a letter to the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) today urging the agency to complete their review of EPA's proposal to classify phthalates as "chemicals that present or may present an unreasonable risk of injury to health or the environment."

"The New York State Parent Teacher Association has adopted resolutions calling for the reduction of toxic materials in schools and is pleased to support the release of this information to the public and urges everyone to reduce their families' exposure to phthalates by choosing phthalate-free products. The Back-to-School Guide to PVC-Free School Supplies released by CHEJ is one source to find those products," says **Sue Rau**, **New York State Parent Teacher Association**.

“Phthalates are chemicals that have been linked to asthma, ADHD, and other chronic health problems in children. This new report has now shown that many common products specifically intended for children have high levels of phthalates. It is imperative that parents are educated about how to protect their children by buying safer PVC-free school supplies, and that our lawmakers pass legislation to protect children from the long-term health effects of phthalate toxicity,” said pediatric neurologist **Dr Maya Shetreat-Klein**, Assistant Clinical Professor of Neurology at **Albert Einstein College of Medicine**.

“Toxic chemicals, like phthalates, are hidden in the school supplies that we buy for our kids and that is a real problem. Toxic chemicals and kids shouldn't mix! WE ACT for Environmental Justice has partnered with the Columbia Children's Environmental Health Center on studies that show how phthalates exposure on women and children in Harlem, Washington Heights and the South Bronx can cause developmental delays and heighten our children's risk of diabetes, obesity and asthma,” comments **Dr. Jalonne L. White-Newsome**, Environmental Justice Federal Policy Analyst, **WE Act for Environmental Justice**.

“As a mom, I am horrified to know that Spider-Man and Dora could be associated with highly toxic chemicals,” said **Penelope Jagessar Chaffer**, Director of the film *Toxic Baby*. “As a filmmaker who has worked on this issue for years, I know what the effects of these toxic chemicals are on the bodies of children. As more and more American moms become aware of this issue, it's clear that we are going to be using our considerable clout as consumers to buy products that are safe for kids. These products are not.”

“This report highlights the fact that parent's can't assume that a product is safe for their kids simply because it is on a store shelf. Nothing could be further from the truth,” said **Kathy Curtis**, Executive Director at **Clean and Healthy New York**. “We need comprehensive laws that make sure chemicals are safe. But until that day, advocates will continue to test products and inform the public about how to protect themselves and their families.”

The *2012 Back-to-School Guide to PVC-free School Supplies*, a guide to safer school supplies in over 40 product categories was announced along with the *Hidden Hazards* Report. The new guide shows shoppers how to choose safer school supplies.

“We are proud to co-release this guide with CHEJ. We strongly support efforts to protect children's health and this guide is an important tool to do just that,” said **Kathleen Donahue**, Vice President of the **New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)**.

“Nothing is more precious to us than our children,” said **Karen Miller**, President of **the Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition (HBCAC)**. “We would go to the ends of the Earth to keep them out of harm's way. Yet common products we purchase are putting our kids at risk for toxic overload. Back to school season has offered some businesses another opportunity to further expose our children to harmful chemicals. It's outrageous! We can do something about it. Today, the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ) released lab results showing which common back-to-school vinyl products contain phthalates. With this important information, we can take necessary steps to protect our families from harmful chemicals. The more we know, the smarter choices we can make. The toxic chemicals we are exposed to early in life affect us during a lifetime. Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition (HBCAC) appreciates Senator Schumer for shining a light on this important health issue.”

“A manufacturer's use of PVC plastic in children's school supplies interferes with our basic right to protect our kids from harm. PVC's many toxic non-binding chemicals have a great potential to be ingested by small children. Now, with so many safe alternatives available, how much longer will our government allow these products to be purchased by unsuspecting consumers?” says **Patti Wood**, Executive Director of **Grassroots Environmental Education**.

"Children are under assault on all fronts from toxic chemicals and this report shows that they're bringing toxics with them to school in their backpacks, lunch boxes and school supplies," said **New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)** Legislative Counsel **Russ Haven**. "Even Spider Man and the intrepid Dora the Explorer can't defend against invisible toxic chemicals that are released from every-day products and absorbed through the skin, inhaled with every breath, or get into food or on fingers and ingested orally."

Resources

New Hidden Hazards Report:

<http://www.chej.org/2012/08/backtoschool2012>

Photos of school supplies tested for phthalates:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/chej/sets/72157631210703538/detail/>

2012 Back To School Guide to Safer Products

http://www.chej.org/publications/PVCGuide/PVCfree2012_1.pdf

2012 Wallet Guide to Safer Products

http://www.chej.org/publications/PVCGuide/PVCwallet2012_1.pdf

Web Ad: What's Banned in Children's Toys But Allowed in School Supplies?

http://www.chej.org/publications/PVCGuide/bts_fb.jpg

Data Excerpts from: *Hidden Hazards: Toxic Chemicals Inside Children's Vinyl Back-to-School Supplies*

- 80% (16/20) of children's back to school supplies sampled contained phthalates.
- Since the phthalates are not chemically bound to the vinyl, they can migrate from within the products to the surface. Children may be exposed to elevated levels of these toxic substances by using these school supplies.
- The phthalates DEHP, DnOP, DMP, and DBP were detected in children's back-to-school supplies.
- 75% (15/20) of children's back-to-school supplies contained levels of phthalates that would be in violation of the federal ban for toys, if these products were considered toys.
- 65% (13/20) of children's back to school supplies sampled contained measurable levels of DEHP.
- 55% (11/20) of children's back to school supplies sampled contained more than one phthalate, indicating children are exposed to multiple phthalates from vinyl back to school supplies.
- None of the products sampled contained labels indicating the products contained phthalates.