

Invisible News

ISSUE 1

BROUGHT to YOU by the GENEVA CHEMICALS & WASTE CLUSTER at the 4th UN Environment Assembly

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The BAD NEWS: Toxics in your home...

Stop and think for a moment. For the most part, you can't see toxic chemicals, but that doesn't mean they are not there.

Scientists estimate the number of chemicals in your body to be more than 700. Many of these are known to be toxic – and to have negative impacts on your health, and on your children's health.

Chemicals are everywhere. Waste is everywhere. Whilst the development of chemicals has led to many positive aspects of economic growth throughout the 20th century, it has also led to severe pollution problems with profound impacts upon human health, upon wildlife, and upon the environment.

And when mankind impacts upon the environment, we impact upon ourselves. Chemicals are now found in our food chain, in our blood, in our breastmilk. Some are carcinogenic. Some damage our neural or reproductive systems. Some lead to birth defects. We must protect ourselves!



Even the most beautiful things might contain invisible but harmful chemicals in them; the good news is that alternatives exist!

Making the Invisible, Visible

The Geneva Chemicals and Waste Cluster is a group of international organisations in Geneva which collectively works to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of chemicals and waste. This lounge area installation is brought to you by four organisations of this cluster, namely:

- Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, & Stockholm Conventions (BRS);
- Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury;
- Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM); and
- UN Environment, Chemicals & Health Branch (UNEP)

See www.brsmeas.org www.mercuryconvention.org www.saicm.org and www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste for more info

The GOOD NEWS: Alternatives exist...!

The good thing is, that there are usually safer alternatives to all of these toxic chemicals.

The Geneva Chemicals and Waste Cluster organisations jointly bring together more than 180 countries working with a range of stakeholders – including the private sector, civil society, academia – in order to achieve sound management of chemicals and waste.

That means, minimising the health risks from chemicals and waste through better management, better information-sharing, and through promoting alternatives to replace the most harmful of substances.

Whether it's in your food, your air, your water, your clothing, your furniture, your mobile phone or your health and cosmetic products, it's important you understand the risks, and are aware of the safer alternatives. That way, you can take better-informed decisions, whether as a consumer, as a parent, or as an enlightened citizen.

So sit back for a while and rest your feet, recharge your phone (did you know it probably contains highly toxic substances?), and read the *Invisible News* for 5 minutes. It might be the best 5 minutes of reading you do during these days!



Sadly, we are exposed to potentially harmful chemicals and waste from a very early age; in fact, this exposure starts even before we are born

Gender Matters to Chemicals & Wastes

Women and children are proportionately more impacted by the harmful effects of chemicals and waste, than are men. This is true for a variety of socio-economic, cultural, and physiological factors.

That's why, gender considerations need to be worked into all efforts to achieve the sound management of chemicals and waste. And that's also why, the empowerment of women and girls, and their fuller involvement in decision-making at family, community, national or international levels, is so key.

What can you do?

- Read the next *Invisible News* sheets to educate yourself about the hazards;
- Visit the websites listed to find out more;
- Seek out safe alternatives when buying food, clothing, furniture – READ the labelling!;
- Discuss with your children, relatives, neighbours.



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