



Dealing With Toxic Chemicals: A Citizen's Role





This handbook supplements an 11-minute slide-tape presentation developed by the Public Participation Staff of EPA's Office of Pesticides and Toxic Substances. The presentation, along with this publication, outlines the prevalent toxic substances issues, the major laws that address their control, and how citizens can take an active role in toxic-related issues.

Credits: Aerial slide of Love Canal, W. Phillipson, c/o Photography Unit, Division of Laboratories and Research, New York State Health Department; Asbestos-covered pipe, c/o Division of Environmental and Industrial Disease Control, Environmental Health Administration, Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

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- (2) Dealing with toxic chemicals: a citizen's role.**
- (3) If you've ever doubted the place of chemicals in twentieth-century life, take a look around. Chemicals are everywhere . . .**
- (4) from the fibers and dyes in our clothes . . .**
- (5) to the pesticides used to grow our food . . .**
- (6) to the products we rely on daily.**
- (7) Since the industrial revolution, industry has developed tens of thousands of chemicals. For several decades we've lived with and depended on these substances . . .**
- (8) because they've touched and improved almost every aspect of our daily lives.**
- (9) In the last few years, however, we've begun to realize that in some cases we may be paying a high price for our pervasive use of chemicals, in terms of human health and environmental hazards.**
- (10) Love Canal, New York, is one example. Here, chemical wastes leaked from their disposal site and contaminated the surrounding neighborhood. Unusually high rates of miscarriage, birth defects, and cancer were reported by residents to New York State health officials.**
- (11) Then there are PCBs. For years, industry used polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, mainly as coolants in electrical equipment.**
- (12) However, they have caused serious human harm . . . skin lesions, swollen limbs, eye and liver problems, and possibly cancer and birth defects. Due to their toxicity, PCBs can no longer be made in this country. Even so, PCBs will persist in our**

environment for years to come because they break down very slowly.

- (13) Their presence has already contaminated our food supply, necessitating destruction of PCB-contaminated chickens and cattle and the *cautious* use of fish from certain lakes and rivers.
- (14) Even our schools and other public buildings, as well as our homes, may contain chemical risks in the form of asbestos.
- (15) Asbestos was once a standard fireproofing and insulation material in pipes, ceilings, and roofs.
- (16) If asbestos materials deteriorate and disperse asbestos *fibers* into the air, we face the danger of inhaling asbestos particles that can cause lung inflammation and cancer.
- (17) Unfortunately, these are *not* rare incidents, but illustrations of our widespread and complex toxic chemical problem. Sometimes it *seems* that chemical hazards are *everywhere*, and that there's little we can do. But much *is* being done already, and there's more for us *to* do.
- (18) Before we see where you can get more information and what *you* can do, let's see how Federal, State, and local governments are working to identify and *solve* these problems through numerous environmental protection laws. Recent Federal laws address the pollution problems of chemicals *in the environment*.
- (19) For example, The Clean Water Act is designed to restore the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's *waters*.
- (20) The Clean Air Act sets standards for *air* quality.
- (21) The *treatment, storage, and disposal* of hazardous wastes are covered under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.
- (22) The Occupational Safety and Health Act authorizes setting exposure standards for toxic and hazardous materials in the *workplace*.

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- (23) Other such laws concern testing, licensing, or registration of chemical *products*, or products that have chemicals in them. For example, The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act requires *registration* of *pesticides* and their *uses* before manufacture.
- (24) The Consumer Product Safety Act and The Federal Hazardous Substances Act limit or prevent the public from being exposed to toxic or other hazardous materials in *consumer products*.
- (25) One of the newest and most far-reaching tools for dealing with toxic substances is the Toxic Substances Control Act, or TSCA. Administered by EPA, TSCA is a very broad-based and comprehensive act. It enables the Government to take *preventive action* on *new* chemical substances and to control *existing* chemicals.
- (26) Under TSCA, EPA can gather chemical information from manufacturers, processors, and importers; identify potentially harmful substances and require industry to test them; review new chemicals and new uses of chemicals before manufacture; and, when necessary, take action to control chemicals that pose unreasonable risks.
- (27) These measures range from requiring simple labeling to completely banning certain chemicals.
- (28) But you are probably asking yourself, "what can I and other citizens do about toxic chemicals? What is our role, and where do we go for information and action?"
- (29) To be *most* effective, it is usually best to work close to the site of the problem, at the local, State, or regional level.
- (30) You can start right in your home, by becoming aware of possible chemical problems and of what chemicals your family may be exposed to.
- (31) Carefully check your home for damaged or deteriorating asbestos material around pipes or on ceilings and for other
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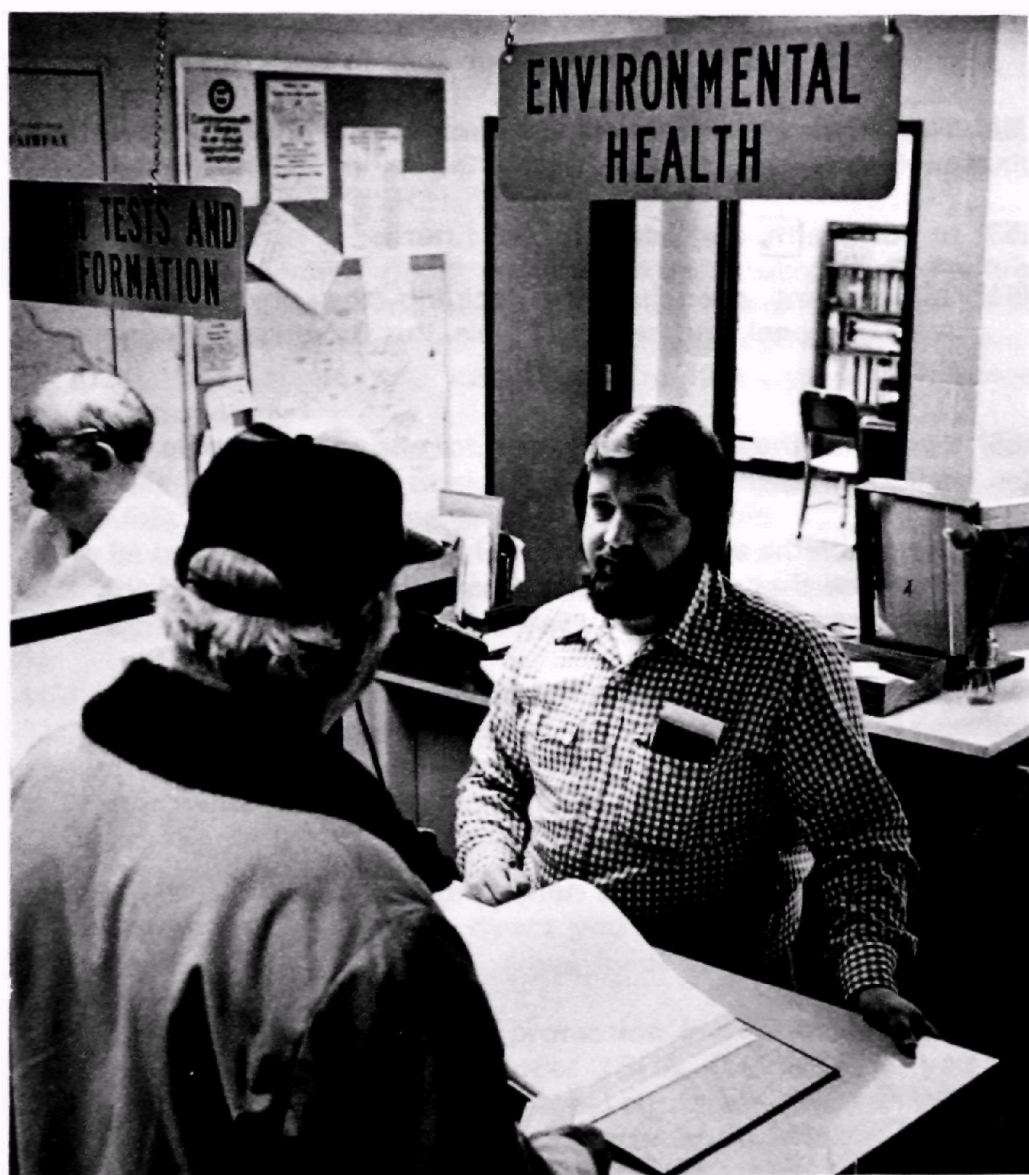
hazardous materials. Read labels on home and garden sprays; by law, manufacturers are required to provide information on *contents* and *proper use*.

- (32) If you or a member of your family works with chemicals, find out exactly what chemicals they are. Insist on full information about them and learn how they should be handled for *minimum* risk.**
- (33) If you come upon an immediate toxic chemical problem, such as a chemical spill into a waterway, call the Coast Guard's National Response Center and the local EPA office. Both are listed under "U.S. Government" in the phone book.**
- (34) Sometimes a *pattern* to toxic chemical *effects* will provide evidence of a particular problem. Try to gather all pertinent facts. This helps to clarify and define the problem and may suggest solutions.**
- (35) For example, an unusual number of cases of animal or human disease, such as cancer cases in local residents, may suggest a pollution problem. Health officials may have records to check that would clarify trends, and *they* can initiate studies to determine the source of the problem.**
- (36) If you've found what appears to be a persistent chemical problem, you should be able to obtain information and action at county and State agencies. Contact the proper authorities in departments of environmental protection, water resources, water management, solid waste, or public health.**
- (37) If you have no specific grievance, but want to keep apprised of local activities to *prevent* problems, find out which local government offices handle environmental affairs.**
- (38) Also check to see what toxic substances provisions are in Federal and State laws. These include water pollution, land use, and other environmental laws.**
- (39) To learn how you can get involved in State-level activities, contact a representative of your State government for advice.**

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- (40) Find out about *permits* issued through your State's department of health, environmental protection, or natural resources. State officials may be able to tell you *which* chemicals are being manufactured, processed, and disposed of, *how* this is being done, and *whether* the substances are likely to be harmful.
- (41) EPA's headquarters in Washington, D.C., provides information on toxic chemicals and environmental laws. Also, each of its 10 *regional* offices can provide this information. Start by checking with the EPA toxic substances coordinator in your nearest EPA regional office.
- (42) Several *information sources* are useful for monitoring Federal developments in a particular area of pollution or toxic substances law.
- (43) The daily *Federal Register* publishes the rules of all Federal agencies. It tells you about proposed rulemaking; describes proposed rules or issues; quotes the legal authority; and gives the date, place, and nature of the hearings on proposed rulemakings.
- (44) It also contains the final rule, which is written only after the public has commented on the proposed rule.
- (45) *The Code of Federal Regulations* contains the body of Federal regulation, organized by *subject*.
- (46) For information about public hearings on environmental issues, including permits and licenses, look in the legal notices section of your local newspaper and check the *Federal Register*. Have your name placed on an agency mailing list to receive information regularly.
- (47) Don't forget your congressman and senator. They can obtain information for you or direct you to the proper information source.
- (48) Almost all environmental protection laws include *provisions* for *citizen participation*. Under TSCA, for example, you can petition to issue, amend, or repeal a rule, and you can take civil action against individuals or Government agencies.
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- (49) In the past, environmental groups have had major impacts on environmental policy. In 1976, for example, four environmental groups filed a suit under the Clean Water Act, which caused a major review of limitations for industrial effluents.
- (50) Legal action on the Federal level, however, is costly and time consuming, and desired results can often be achieved through efforts at the State and local levels.
- (51) Today, we live with and depend on tens of thousands of chemicals in every aspect of our daily lives.
- (52) Yet, we also now *know* how harmful some chemicals *can* be to environment . . .
- (53) to our health, and possibly, our futures.
- (54) Government agencies are tackling the problem at local, State, regional, and national levels. But Government cannot act alone . . .
- (56) even *with* the legislation to control and prevent toxic chemical pollution.
- (56) The problems associated with chemical use belong to all of us. And now that we have the information systems and the legal structures to act . . .
- (57) it's up to all of us to use them.
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Information/ Contact Sources



EPA FEDERAL REGIONAL OFFICES

For assistance and information on toxic chemicals and other environmental issues, contact either the Toxic Substances Program or the Public Awareness Office of the nearest EPA regional office.

Region 1: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (617) 223-0585

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (617) 223-7223

Address for either office:
John F. Kennedy Federal Building
Boston, Massachusetts 02203

Region 2: New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (212) 264-4296

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (212) 264-2515

Address for either office:
26 Federal Plaza
New York, New York 10007

Region 3: Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, District of Columbia

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (215) 597-4058

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (215) 597-9370

Address for either office:
6th and Walnut Streets
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

Region 4: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (404) 881-3864

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (404) 881-3004

Address for either office:
345 Courtland Street, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30308

Region 5: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (312) 353-2291

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (312) 353-2072

Address for either office:
230 South Dearborn Street
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Region 6: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (214) 767-2734

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (214) 767-2630

Address for either office:
First International Building
Dallas, Texas 75270

Region 7: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (816) 374-3036

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (816) 374-5894

Address for either office:
1735 Baltimore Street
Kansas City, Missouri 64108

Region 8: Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (303) 837-3926

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (303) 837-5927

Address for either office:
1860 Lincoln Street
Denver, Colorado 80203

Region 9: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (415) 556-4606

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (415) 556-6695

Address for either office:
215 Fremont Street
San Francisco, California 94105

Region 10: Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington

Toxic Substances Program
Phone: (206) 442-1090

Public Awareness Office
Phone: (206) 442-1203

Address for either office:
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101

EPA HEADQUARTERS (WASHINGTON, D.C.)

To obtain information and publications on toxic chemicals and other environmental issues, or to report an environmental problem in your community, contact:

**Public Information Center (PM-215)
Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, D.C. 20460
(202) 755-0707**

(The information distributed by this office is written in non-technical language for the general public).

For information and publications on the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), contact:

**Office of
Pesticides and Toxic Substances (TS-799)
Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, D.C. 20460
800-424-9065 (toll free)
554-1404 (In Washington, D.C.)**

(The information distributed by the Office of Pesticides and Toxic Substances is primarily material to assist the chemical industry in its compliance with TSCA provisions; therefore, it is more technical in nature than the information issued by the office listed above.)

To contact the Public Participation Staff of EPA's Office of Pesticides and Toxic Substances, write or call:

**Office of
Pesticides and Toxic Substances (TS-793)
Public Participation Staff
Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, D.C. 20460
(202) 755-4854**

STATE OFFICES

On the State level most environmental planning and problems are handled under offices of the Governor. Your Governor's office will refer you to the appropriate environmental or public health affairs office for toxic chemical concerns.

EMERGENCY CHEMICAL SPILLS

Phone local authorities—police, fire department, or local health department to advise them of the spill.

Also report all oil or hazardous material spills to the Coast Guard at the emergency number listed below. They will immediately contact the nearest Federal EPA Regional Office and take any other necessary action to control the spill and its effects.

**U.S. Coast Guard
National Response Center
(800) 424-8802
(toll free/24-hour service)
426-2675 (in Washington, D.C.)**

FEDERAL PUBLICATIONS & SOURCES

The Federal Register (published 5 days a week) and ***The Code of Federal Regulations*** (several volumes published annually) carry notices of proposed and final Federal regulations. To obtain copies of either of these, contact Government depository libraries or write to:

**Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402**

Information about national environmental developments is available in the ***EPA Journal***. For an annual subscription, send a check or money order for \$12 (\$15 for a foreign address) to:

**Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402**

A recorded phone announcement from the Federal Register Office provides information on upcoming ***Federal Register*** contents. This service, known as **Dial-A-Reg**, highlights the information contained in the following day's ***Federal Register***. **Dial-A-Reg** is currently available in three cities:

**Washington, D.C.
(202) 523-5022**

**Chicago, Illinois
(312) 633-0884**

**Los Angeles, California
(213) 688-6694**

Instructions For Using Slide-Tape Equipment

PROVIDED:

60 slides

They are numbered in the sequence in which they are to be placed in the slide tray.

11-minute cassette tape

(The tape cassette side you use depends on the kind of tape recorder you have—see below.)

Side (a), labeled “inaudible pulses,” silently and automatically advances each slide at the proper time throughout the narration if the tape recorder is connected to or “synched” with a projector.

Side (b), labeled “audible tone,” provides an audible “beep” sound throughout the narration. At the sound of the beep, you advance to the next slide by using a manual control unit. The tape recorder and projector do not need to be “synched.”

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

Projector screen (or a white or light-colored wall).

Slide projector.

Slide tray.

(Use one with a maximum capacity for 80 slides. Trays that hold up to 140 slides can present problems, such as slides failing to drop down into place.)

Tape recorder.

To use the side of the cassette tape marked “inaudible pulses,” you need a tape recorder that is “synched” with the projector. (The tape recorder must connect to a projector to advance the slides.) The recorder must be able to play back 1,000 Hz pulses.

To use the side of the cassette tape marked “audible tone,” you need a tape recorder that can handle a cassette. Advance slides manually each time the “beep” sound is heard.

PREPARATION:

Put slides in the tray with numbers in the upper righthand corner. Start the show by projecting the first (blank) slide and beginning the tape. If you are using the *inaudible* pulsed side of the tape, with a projector synched to the tape recorder, the slides will advance automatically. If you are using the *audible* pulsed side of the tape, you must advance the slides manually each time you hear a “beep” sound.

IF YOU HAVE NO TAPE RECORDER:

If you do not have a tape recorder, read the script provided at the front of this handbook and change the slides as indicated. Focus the second slide (the first is a blank), and then begin reading the script, changing the slide every time a number appears in the script.