



Collaborative on Health and the Environment

eNewsletter -- January 2010



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GETTING THE QUESTIONS RIGHT

With epigenetics on the cover of *Time* magazine this week, public awareness of the links between our genes, our environment and our health has never been so widespread. Throughout history, breakthroughs in understanding have been largely shaped and guided by the questions we choose to ask. After World War II, the questions most researchers as well as policymakers in the U.S. were asking focused on how to build infrastructures to catalyze the growth of large-scale industrial processes and products -- from pesticides to plastics to pharmaceuticals. The underlying assumption was that we could improve on nature without necessarily understanding or abiding by the natural principles that have allowed life to be nourished and sustained for the previous tens of thousands of years.

In just the last generation, however, new and pressing questions have begun to emerge. For example, why -- with the vast availability of food products, abundance of sophisticated technologies, and myriad advances in medicine -- are more and more people facing chronic diseases and other health problems in the U.S. as well as experiencing a lower quality of life? Why -- if being successful means driving bigger cars and having bigger houses -- would we be seeing glaciers melting at unprecedented rates and millions of new climate refugees?

Clearly, we can no longer delude ourselves that 'improving on nature' is predicated on disregarding it -- and instead, ask how can we work within the systems and imitate the processes that have made this planet life-sustaining to date?

Fortunately, there are more and more researchers and others who are asking just that, and perhaps none more energetically than those in the increasingly robust field of green chemistry. Just a couple weeks ago, Paul Anastas, PhD, who is considered by some 'the father of green chemistry', was finally appointed Assistant Administrator of the Office of Research and Development at the EPA. For some years now, he and other colleagues -- including many of you -- have suggested that a number of the major problems we see today, such as the adverse health consequences of toxic exposures and climate change, are in large part due to not asking the right questions in the first place (or perhaps, as some would argue, there were simply too few people in power asking those essential questions). By contrast, those in green chemistry are urging us to ask a set of principled questions before creating new products and technologies, so that, ultimately, the trajectory of our choices can be as biologically and ecologically benign as possible.

This month CHE is hosting or co-sponsoring three national/international calls that are intended to help us ask better questions so that our pursuits can be more in keeping with the natural systems in which we have evolved and in which future generations will live. The

first is a CHE Café Call with Elizabeth Grossman, author of the recently published book, *Chasing Molecules*, which describes how green chemistry has the potential to not only lead to safer products and materials, but reduce the health impacts of climate change. The next is a CHE Partner call on the potential health impacts of chemicals that can disrupt thyroid dysfunction and how chemical policy reform can help address these concerns. And the third call will be co-sponsored with SeaTrust and IGI and feature two colleagues working at the intersection of climate change and health and attended the recent Copenhagen climate change talks. For more information on these calls and how to register, please view the left-hand column on CHE's home webpage: <http://www.healthandenvironment.org>.

I truly look forward to collaborating with you in the New Year in order to hone our capacity to get the questions right as we work towards a healthier tomorrow.

With warm regards,

Elise Miller, MEd
Director

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Collaborative on Health and the Environment

CHE Science Cafe Call
A Conversation with Elizabeth Grossman, author of *Chasing Molecules*
January 19, 2010 at 11 AM Pacific / 2 PM Eastern

[RSVP for this call](#)

Known for her book *High Tech Trash*, an expose of the electronic waste industry, Elizabeth Grossman's new book, *Chasing Molecules: Poisonous Products, Human Health, and the Promise of Green Chemistry*, reveals the dangers and the extent of the chemicals that are found in everyday products such as BPA, perfluorinated compounds, brominated flame retardants, and phthalates, and offers up hope for a future without them. With *Chasing Molecules*, Grossman reveals that we can do better; that we can make materials that we have come to rely on with chemicals that have been tested to be safe and are in fact "benign by design." In a radical departure from how synthetic chemistry has been practiced, Grossman suggests that green chemistry should be used to create new materials for use in everything from sippy cups to carpets.

Join CHE Director, Elise Miller, for a conversation with Grossman on **Tuesday January 19, 2010 at 11 AM Pacific / 2 PM Eastern**.

CHE Partnership Call
Upstream: Complex Chemical Contributors to Thyroid Function and the Potential Impacts on Policy
January 21, 2010 at 10 AM Pacific / 1 PM Eastern

[RSVP for this call](#)

Join CHE for a discussion of the complex array of chemical contributors to thyroid function. Presenters will cover chemicals linked to thyroid function, upstream biological impacts to thyroid hormones during pregnancy that can lead to a variety of health problems later in life and the policy implications given all the complexity. In particular, speakers will address perchlorate, which inhibits the uptake of iodide into the thyroid gland, an essential part of the process of making thyroid hormone. Small changes in maternal thyroid hormone are associated with significant decreases in IQ.

Featured speakers include:

- **Tom Zoeller**, Professor and Chair of Biology, University of Massachusetts
- **Greg Brent**, Professor of Medicine and Physiology, UCLA School of Medicine

- **Greg Bratt,** Professor of Medicine and Physiology, UCSF School of Medicine
- **Tracey Woodruff,** Director, Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment and Associate Professor, UCSF
- **Craig Steinmaus,** Public Health Medical Officer III, California Environmental Protection Agency and Assistant Adjunct Professor, University of California at Berkeley

This call will be moderated by Steve Heilig, Director of Public Health and Education at the San Francisco Medical Society and CHE. It will last one hour and will be recorded for archival purposes.

Web Event: Report from the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen: Implications for Human Health

Sponsored by [SeaTrust Institute](#) and IGI Global and co-sponsored by the Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE)

January 28, 2010 at 10 AM PST / 1 PM EST

Web Event: Registration now open at:

https://sas.illuminate.com/site/external/event/description?instance_id=18649

Dr. Lynn Wilson returns from participating in the international climate change meetings in Copenhagen to engage webinar participants in what is being called "the forgotten discussion" in the climate change equation: human health. Besides offering reflections as representative for an admitted civil society organization in the official negotiations, Lynn will share insights from participation in working groups on climate and health, informal discussions and side events to present a picture of international collaboration and conflict, knowledge and progress in this critical scientific and policy arena.

Save the date: February CHE Partnership Call with Linda Birnbaum

February 4, 2010 at 10 AM Pacific / 1 PM Eastern

[RSVP for this call](#)

CHE is pleased to announce an upcoming Partnership call with Linda Birnbaum, Director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. Birnbaum will discuss the priorities and challenges facing the NIEHS in the coming years as well as discuss other pressing environmental health concerns.

This call will be moderated by Steve Heilig, Director of Public Health and Education at the San Francisco Medical Society and CHE. It will last one hour and will be recorded for archival purposes.

Resources from recent CHE calls:

If you missed any of the following CHE calls, you may listen to MP3 recordings and find supporting materials at the following links:

- December 8, 2009 - CHE Fertility/Partnership call: [To Ban or Not to Ban: A Review of Atrazine from Both Sides of the Atlantic](#)
- November 11, 2009 - [Navigating the Scientific Evidence to Ensure Prevention](#)
- October 15, 2009 - [Late Lessons from Early Warnings: the Precautionary Principle 1896-2000: a Conversation with David Gee](#)

And of course, you can always explore our [archived resources](#) from past Partnership calls.

CHE Working and Regional Group Updates

Working Group Highlights:

CHE is proud to highlight each month new and exciting working group efforts, which continue to draw the link between health and the environment.

This month:

~ CHE announces new **Autism Working Group**, moderated by Michael Lerner and Sheila Opperman.

~ **CHE-ICEH** announces new **Climate Change and Children's Health webpage**.
[More information](#)

CHE Autism

~ coordinated by **Michael Lerner and Sheila Opperman**

As a New Year gift to the many CHE Partners interested in autism, CHE is initiating CHE-Autism, a Working Group dedicated to exploring the new paradigm of autism research and treatment in Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

CHE and Commonweal have had a strong interest in ASD for many years. Commonweal co-hosted a series of conferences over the past decade exploring the new paradigm of autism research and treatment. Two of the co-hosts of these conferences, Martha Herbert and Robert Hendren have agreed to serve as Science Advisers to CHE Autism.

Both Dr. Herbert and Dr. Hendren are pioneering leaders in new paradigm of autism research and treatment. We are grateful for their ongoing support.

CHE-Autism will be a facilitated list to ensure that all posts are germane to Partner interests and meet our CHE standards of "science and civility." That means that all posts will be reviewed by a facilitator before being posted to the list.

Michael Lerner will facilitate CHE-Autism initially with his colleague Sheila Opperman, who has been involved with autism work for years. CHE hopes to identify Partners who would like to be candidates for the position of co-facilitators. This involves reviewing posts for distribution to the list, responding to Partner concerns, and seeking out relevant science reports for distribution. It requires a strong grounding in both CHE's standards of science and civility, excellent judgment and willingness to volunteer time each day to stay current on the science news flow.

To join CHE Autism contact: info@healthandenvironment.org.
[More information on the CHE Autism Working Group](#)

CHE-Fertility

~ coordinated by **Julia Varshavsky, CHE Program Associate**,
julia@healthandenvironment.org

~ **CHE Fertility: Disinfectants Overkill**

Save the date for the next CHE-Fertility call, which will highlight the recently released Women's Voices for the Earth report, [Disinfectants Overkill](#), which outlines the health impacts associated with common antimicrobial chemicals and safer alternatives. Presenters will discuss emerging disinfectants of concern including quaternary compounds and triclosan.

The call is scheduled for **Thursday January 14, 2010 at 10:00 AM Pacific / 1:00 PM Eastern**. Please email julia@healthandenvironment.org if you plan to join the call so that we can reserve the correct number of lines.

Dial-in information:

1-270-400-2000

Access code: 198686#

Confirmed speakers:

- **Erin Switalski**, Executive Director, Women's Voices for the Earth

- **Alexandra Gorman Scranton**, MS, Director of Science and Research, Women's Voices for the Earth
- **Patricia Hunt**, PhD, Meyer Distinguished Professor, School of Molecular Biosciences, Washington State University
- **Ann Blake**, PhD, Environmental & Public Health Consulting

~ **ACOG presents Environmental Toxins and Women's Health - Pesticides:** On Tuesday January 19, 2010 join [ACOG](#) at the California State Capitol, Room 126 for presentation by Robin Johnson, District IX Committee o State Legislation, Director, Family Engagement Program, LA Best Babies Network; Tracey Woodruff, Associate Professor and Director, Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment, UCSF; Sarah Janssen, Health and Environment Program, Natural Resources Defense Council; and Martha Arguello, Executive Director, Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles. Opening remarks will be given by Speaker Pro-tempore Assemblymember Lori Saldana. To RSVP or for more information, contact Robin Finnestead at 916-446-ACOG (2264) or email rfinnestead@ca.acog.org

~ **Reproductive health briefing on Capitol Hill:** On December 15, 2009, 80 people gathered for the Dangers of Chemicals on Reproductive Health briefing in D.C. This widely attended event was hosted by the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP), Reproductive Health Technologies Project (RHTP) and [Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families](#), in cooperation with Representative Jane Harman (D-CA) and Representative Lois Capps (D-CA). Participants heard presentations from Beth Jordan, MD, Medical Director of ARHP, Ted Schettler, MD, MPH, Science Director of CHE and the Science and Environmental Health Network, and Tracey Woodruff, PhD, MPH, Associate Professor and Director of the Program on Reproductive Health at the University of California, San Francisco. Read the follow-up blog by Jenn Rogers, Programs and Policy Director of RHTP: ['Twas the Night Before the Reproductive Health Hearing](#)

~ **New bill introduced: The Endocrine Disruption Prevention Act of 2009**

On December 3, 2009, Representative Jim Moran and Senator John Kerry introduced The Endocrine Disruption Prevention Act of 2009 to authorize an ambitious research program at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). The goal of the program is to develop reliable and reproducible methods to identify chemicals that can disrupt the human endocrine system. This bill will facilitate the development of comprehensive multi-system assays to identify EDCs.

[More information and download a copy of the bill](#)

~ **Spot the difference: can the body distinguish between thyroid hormones and chemical imitators?**

This month's *Health and Environment* speculates that structural similarity between man-made molecules (such as triclosan) and thyroid hormones is suggestive of a potential for causing thyroid illness. H&E is a monthly e-publication and blog about environmental health issues, how they affect humans, and (somewhat indirectly) what role in these terms healthcare can play in preventing illness. On the basis of this article, H&E has thrown together a quick-and-dirty reading list for anyone interested in some of the primary research in the area.

[Read the article](#)

[Reading list: endocrine disruptors and the thyroid](#)

CHE-ICEH

~ **coordinated by Elise Miller, CHE Director. For more information contact info@healthandenvironment.org**

~ With several recent reports and statements regarding the impact of climate change on health, CHE's Initiative on Children's Environmental Health (ICEH) is pleased to provide a new resource page on climate change and children's health. This page lays out why children are especially vulnerable, what health impacts may be caused or exacerbated by climate change and actions that we can take as individuals and as groups. A resources section also links to additional information. This new resource will be updated as new information becomes available.

[CHE's Climate Change and Children's Health webpage](#)

CHE LDDI

~coordinated by **Laura Abulafia**, laura@healthandenvironment.org and **Elise Miller**, elise@healthandenvironment.org

~ **The LDDI Biomonitoring** report will be released in February. More details will be circulated when the exact date and times are confirmed. For additional information, please contact Laura Abulafia at laura@healthandenvironment.org

~ **LDDI's website** is now fully transferred to its new location and is also accessible through a new URL that's more meaningful and easier to remember: www.disabilityandenvironment.org. Please update the links on your websites to use this new URL.

~ **Mental Health and Environment Working Group**: The National Association for the Dually Diagnosed (NADD) will host the next Mental Health and Environment Working Group call on Friday January 22, 2010 at 1:00 PM Eastern. For more information, please contact Ed Seliger at eseliger@thenadd.org

CHE Regional Working Groups Updates

CHE Alaska

~ coordinated by **Pam Miller**, pkmiller@akaction.net

~ **CHE Alaska announces teleconference: How the Chemical Industry Harms Children's Health: The Need for Protective Public Policy**
Wednesday January 27, 2010 at 9:00 AM Alaska time / 1:00 PM Eastern

GUEST SPEAKER: Alice Shabecoff is co-author with her husband Philip of *Poisoned Profits: The Toxic Assault on our Children*, published in 2008 (to be published this spring in paperback as *Poisoned for Profit*). Alice now writes 'blog' articles on children's environmental health for MomsRising.org, HealthSentinel.com, and the [Environmental Working Group](http://EnvironmentalWorkingGroup.org). She is a member of the Board of Directors of Birth Defects Research Center. She served in the 1970s as executive director of the National Consumers League, the country's oldest consumer organization, and in the 1980s as founder and executive director of the national nonprofit Community Information Exchange, an information service for the community development sector. As a freelance journalist focusing on family and consumer topics, her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, the *International Herald Tribune* and many international publications.

For more information or to join this free call and receive dial-up instructions, please **RSVP to Alaska Community Action on Toxics at 907-222-7714 or diana@akaction.org**

CHE-HEAL

~ coordinated by **Lisette van Vliet**, Lisette@env-health.org

~ **Health and climate change**: The Health and Environment Alliance ([HEAL](http://HEAL.org)), and partner Health Care Without Harm attended the UN negotiations on Climate Change in Copenhagen, with a strong health delegation, with the "Prescription for a Healthy Planet". The President of the Standing Committee on European Doctors (CPME), Dr Michael Wilks took a leading role in Copenhagen as part of the HEAL delegation. On his return to Brussels, his editorial ([read the editorial](#)) was published in the British Medical Journal and for the 27 European medical association membership on the [CPME website](http://CPME.org).

Our work has contributed to the global health community becoming an important part of the civil society movement on climate change. HEAL is now taking part in strategic discussions, and the profile of health issues has been steadily rising in climate change public debate. Articles on the health perspective have been published in both the Copenhagen civil society publication and the newsletter of the European Climate Action Network (CAN E). Looking ahead, HEAL will be taking part in discussions with WHO Europe and countries in the European region this month on an action plan for health and climate change

~ **Health and toxic chemicals:** On the 22nd December, the European Environment Ministers expressed concerns that the environment and the health of European citizens may not be properly protected from the combined effects of hazardous chemicals, particularly those that can disrupt hormones. Member organizations from HEAL and other NGOs working on hazardous chemicals have been active in urging their governments to take note of issue, and the need to reduced peoples' combined exposure to such chemicals. The European Commission will have two years to analyse the gaps in existing EU legislation concerning the 'cocktail' effect, and propose changes. HEAL and fellow NGOs are urging the European Commission to prepare specific changes to EU legislation, especially the new law on chemicals 'REACH'.

CHE Washington

~ coordinated by **Steve Gilbert**, sgilbert@innd.org or contact info@healthandenvironment.org

~ **Forum Presentations Online:** Videos from presentations at the Northwest Children's Environmental Health Forum in October have all been added to the Forum web page: www.chenw.org/CEHforum.html.

~ **CHE-WA coordinator Steve Gilbert and others present Particles on the Wall at Cafe Allegro, Seattle:** Particles on the Wall is an interdisciplinary exhibit featuring visual art, literary art and science exploring major elements of the nuclear age. The exhibit addresses our history related to the Hanford Nuclear Site, as well as broader nuclear and peace issues. Contributing artists include Mike Bristow, Janice Camp, Dianne Dickeman, T. Michael Gardiner, William Witherup and others. The exhibit will run from January 3--January 30, 2010 with an opening night reception on Friday, January 8, 2010 at 7 PM.

For more information, please contact Nancy Dickeman at nancydickeman@gmail.com or 206-354-2170.

Announcements and News Highlights

2nd Annual Northwest Environmental Health Conference to be held in Oregon March 5 -6, 2010

The Oregon Environmental Council, the Oregon Student Nurses Association, the Oregon Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility, Multnomah County Environmental Health Services, Health Care Without Harm and others are organizing the **Second Annual NW Environmental Health Conference**. Registration opens December 14, 2009. [More information](#)

EPA seeks stricter limits on smog pollutants

The smog proposal, which must undergo 60 days of public comment before becoming final and would take full effect in 2020, would help determine the quality of the air Americans will breathe for at least a decade. Under the Clean Air Act, the federal government must reexamine every five years whether its ozone standards are adequate, but it traditionally takes more than 10 years to enact new rules. [Read the full article from the Washington Post](#)

Environmental Health News posts top environmental health stories of 2009

In 2009, the team at *Environmental Health News* hand-selected and posted 71,143 stories that were published in the worldwide media. They have now compiled a list of those they consider the year's most important. [Read the list](#)

Use of potentially harmful chemicals kept secret under law

On January 4, 2010 Lyndsey Layton of the *Washington Post* reported on work that the Environmental Working Group has been doing to expose a "regulatory black hole" in the

Toxic Substance Control Act. The Post reports, "Of the 84,000 chemicals in commercial use in the United States -- from flame retardants in furniture to household cleaners -- nearly 20 percent are secret, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, their names and physical properties guarded from consumers and virtually all public officials under a little-known federal provision."

[Read the full article](#)

[EWG's website with more information](#)

January 2010 issue of Environmental Health Perspectives available online

<http://ehp03.niehs.nih.gov/home.action>

January 2010 issue of Environmental Factor available online

<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/news/newsletter/index.cfm>

Reports, Resources and Other Updates

CHE's searchable calendar

CHE provides a searchable calendar of environmental health events from throughout the US and around the world: <http://www.healthandenvironment.org/cgi-bin/searchevents.cgi>

CDC releases Fourth National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals

This report is the most comprehensive assessment to date of the exposure of the U.S. population to chemicals in our environment.

[Read the report](#)

New study shows low amount of BPA can increase cardiac risk by 45%

The *Toronto Globe and Mail* reports that elevated exposure to bisphenol A has been linked in a new study to a significantly increased risk for cardiovascular disease, the second time researchers have made a connection between the widely used plastic-making compound and heart ailments.

[Read the full article](#)

[Read a related article published on PLoS One, Association of Urinary Bisphenol A Concentration with Heart Disease: Evidence from NHANES 2003/06](#)

EPA announces action to address chemicals of concern, including phthalates

On December 30, 2009, as part of EPA's comprehensive approach to enhancing the Agency's current chemicals management program under TSCA, EPA posted action plans on phthalates, long-chain perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs), polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) in products, and short-chain chlorinated paraffins.

[More information](#)

Thank you for taking the time to read the latest about CHE. As always, we welcome your questions and suggestions. Please direct comments to Elise Miller, Director of CHE, at elise@healthandenvironment.org.

Best wishes,

Elise Miller, MEd, Director

Steve Heilig, Director of Public Health and Education at San Francisco Medical Society and CHE

Erika Sanders, Administrative Coordinator

Julia Varshavsky, Program Associate

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