

## Center for Health, Environment & Justice

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### **After Four Years of Delay, NYC Issues Landmark “Green Purchasing” Rules for City Agencies to Reduce Dioxin, One of the Most Toxic Chemicals Known to Science**

#### ***Environmental, Public Health, Labor Groups Call on Bloomberg Administration to Phase Out Toxic PVC Plastic, a Major Source of Dioxin***

**(New York, NY)** At a major public hearing held today by the NYC Mayor’s Office of Contract Services (MOCS), environmental health, labor, and pediatric medical organizations and experts testified and called on the Bloomberg administration to fully implement a “green purchasing” law 7 years in the making, by phasing out the purchase of toxic polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic.

The NYC 2005 Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) laws called for the development of City regulations to reduce the purchase of products by City agencies that release toxic dioxin when burned. Dioxin is linked to cancer, learning disabilities, diabetes, birth defects, endometriosis, and infertility, and is widely considered to be the most toxic synthetic chemical. The 2005 law was intended to reduce NYC’s purchase of products containing PVC that form dioxin. After more than four years of delay, the EPP rules were released on February 27th, yet do not address NYC’s purchase of PVC products.

“We are very concerned that the proposed dioxin regulations do not address NYC’s purchase of PVC plastic, a major and preventable source of dioxin,” said **Daniel Gradess, Organizer with the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ)**. “The New York Academy of Sciences and New York State Attorney General’s Office have both documented PVC as a significant dioxin source. The Bloomberg Administration has an opportunity to lead the nation in reducing the purchase of this unnecessary toxic plastic harmful to children’s health.”

“Fire Officers take an oath to “protect the lives and property of the citizens of New York City” and there is an ongoing interest to the public if laws regarding the purchasing and use of PVC products by the city are not being complied with,” said **Captain Alexander Hagan, President of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association (UFOA)**. “PVC is among the most serious dangers to humans and the environment when it is burned. It releases dioxin, which is widely considered to be one of the most toxic chemicals on the planet, and virtually every resident of NYC has measurable levels of dioxin in their bodies. From a fire perspective, we urge compliance of the City to ensure an environmentally friendly purchasing process.”

Groups testifying at today’s hearing included representatives of the Learning Disabilities Association of NYS; Children’s Environmental Health Center of Mount Sinai School of Medicine; Sierra Club NYC Chapter; New York Committee for Occupational Safety & Health (NYCOSH); CWA Healthcare Coordinating Council; Perkins and Will Architectural Firm; the Center for Health, Environment & Justice; Center for Environmental Health; Ironbound Community Corporation; Food and Water Watch; and others. Many other groups submitted written comments on the proposed regulations, including the Uniformed Firefighters Officers Association (UFOA); United Federation of Teachers (UFT); American Sustainable Business Council; the New York Lawyers for the Public Interest; Healthy Schools Network; NYPIRG; and Health Care Without Harm.

Safer, cost-effective alternatives are readily available for NYC agencies to purchase. Major corporations such as Google, Apple, Target, Wal-Mart, Procter & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson, and Microsoft have policies to reduce or phase out the purchase of PVC. The NYC Mayor's Office of Contract Services (MOCS) and Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) have both begun to make voluntary progress by reducing the purchase of PVC products:

- NYC purchases its computers off of state contracts, which require all computers to be free of PVC in large plastic parts.
- In January, MOCS announced it is working with Staples to reduce the purchase of PVC office supplies by City Agencies.
- In March, DCAS issued a request for bids for a new NYC carpet contract. This multi-year, multi-million dollar contract states that all carpets sold to NYC must be completely PVC-free.

Advocates today called on the Bloomberg Administration to codify these voluntary efforts into the proposed environmentally preferable purchasing regulations.

"The incidence of learning disability and related neurological impairment such as autism, is increasing at an unprecedented rate," said, **Stephen Boese, Executive Director of the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State**. "Research shows that a substantial part of this increase is attributable to environmental factors. Meanwhile, many chemicals known or suspected to cause neurological impairment remain largely unregulated by the federal government. As advocates for persons with learning disabilities and related impairments, the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State supports initiatives that prevent disability. We therefore urge that the City of New York assure that its purchasing policies excludes products with harmful plastics like PVC that release dioxin, wherever feasible, and protect the health and well-being of city workers, those in the care of city programs, and all other city residents."

**Jean Grassman, a Board Member with the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH), said,** "When buildings containing materials made of PVC burn, firefighters, other "first responders", building occupants, and the surrounding community face exposure to dioxins, benzene, phosgene, hydrochloric acid and other hazardous substances which place them at risk of acute and chronic health effects. Exposure to a single PVC fire can cause permanent respiratory disease."

"It is our belief that products that are harmful to humans, animals, and the environment should not be used in our projects, and to that end, we advise our clients to seek alternatives to substances such as PVC," said **Peter Syrett, Architect and Associate Principal at Perkins+Will**.

**Larry McCormick is an officer of the CWA Healthcare Coordinating Council (HCC), a network for two dozen union locals in New York and New Jersey that represent 15,000 healthcare workers.** He notes, "The HCC urges New York to phase out the purchase of PVC. We put our patients first, and we believe a PVC phase out will help reduce cancer, learning disabilities, infertility, birth defects, and diabetes in those we care for."

"Phasing PVC plastic out of City purchasing is the right move for New Yorkers' health and environment," said **Irene Van Slyke, Vice President of the Sierra Club New York City Group**. "We should act now to prioritize nontoxic, cost-effective alternatives to PVC, rather than continuing to pay for the healthcare costs associated with dioxin exposure."

**Ellen Weininger, Educational Outreach Coordinator for Grassroots Environmental Education, said,** "The best way to avoid the negative human health and environmental impacts and economic burden of toxic exposures is to minimize the production and purchase of toxic products. Children and their parents rely on government officials to provide the protections they need for their health and safety. The stakes are too high to deliver anything less than the full implementation of a PVC-free procurement plan for New York City."

"When buyers demand safer products, the market responds," **said Ansje Miller, Eastern States Director, of the Center for Environmental Health.** "By phasing out the poison plastic PVC, NYC will create a global market for safer electronics and other products, creating a healthier environment for workers, consumers, and all New Yorkers."

**Claire Barnett, Executive Director of the Healthy Schools Network, said,** "With every manufacturer advertising products as green, it is hard for cities and states to determine what is green and what is merely green washing. Mindful of the public health effects of chemicals in products and the rising epidemics of asthma and learning problems, we urge the Mayor's Office of Contract Services to take more care to ensure that the products it specs are truly healthy and green. Relying on third party certifiers will do that."

Thursday's public hearing concludes a 30-day public comment period, and comes on the heels of a January 2012 NYC Council oversight hearing examining NYC's compliance with the green purchasing laws.

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***ATTENTION JOURNALISTS:*** For copies of testimony delivered at today's hearing, or additional background information, please contact Mike Schade, CHEJ at [mike@chej.org](mailto:mike@chej.org) / 212.964.3680.

To download the NYC proposed environmentally preferable purchasing regulations, visit [http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycrules/downloads/rules/P\\_MOCS\\_2.24.12\\_A.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycrules/downloads/rules/P_MOCS_2.24.12_A.pdf)

To download the original legislation and 2005 City Council voting report that discusses the relationship between PVC and dioxin, visit <http://chej.org/wp-content/uploads/12-21-05-Voting-Report-Int-544-A-Hazardous.pdf>