



Toxics Briefing

Board of County Commissioners
April 16, 2013



What are Toxics?

- There are dangerous things in our environment that we are exposed to every day. “Toxics” is the name we give to chemicals that likely impact human health when we are exposed to them. In the last century, the amount of toxics in our environment has increased significantly.
- Scientific studies have found that many of these chemicals pose a danger to human health, including developmental problems, cancer, birth defects and respiratory diseases like asthma.
- We are exposed to multiple chemicals through multiple pathways – through the air we breathe, the food we eat, the containers our food comes in, and the products we use, such as cosmetics.¹

What are examples of health effects and who is impacted?

- Our most vulnerable populations are often disproportionately impacted.
- Lead is a heavy metal that we are exposed to through lead-based paint, imported pottery, old water infrastructure and in certain occupations. Exposure to lead is known to cause brain damage, learning and behavioral disorders and stunted growth in children. Children represent a population of particular concern because their behavior patterns and early growth make them biologically sensitive; and injury to developing organ systems can cause lifelong disability.
- Diesel particulate matter 2.5 is a product from on and off-road equipment that is powered by diesel-fuel. Particulate matter 2.5 is incredibly small, which is what makes it particularly harmful. At this size, it evades the body’s natural respiratory defenses. Young children are more vulnerable to the health effects of diesel particulate matter both in terms of respiratory impacts and greater likelihood of exposure.

What is Multnomah County doing to reduce our exposure to toxics?

Multnomah County has and continues to be a champion for toxics reduction:

- A joint city/county clean-diesel partnership was responsible for retrofitting nearly 200 vehicles with diesel emission control devices.
- We had a clean-contractors policy pilot project on the East-County courthouse construction.
- We have a Toxics Reduction Strategy that has worked on decreasing exposure within our government operations, i.e. reducing exposure to mercury and volatile organic compounds.
- The Health Department has been working on reducing exposure to lead and volatile organic compounds through blood testing and in-home assessment. We are also actively working with community partners to identify pressing concerns in the community.

¹ “Price of Pollution” report, Renee Hackenmiller-Paradis, Oregon Environmental Council, February 2008, <http://www.oeconline.org/resources/publications/reportsandstudies/pop>