

The Louisville Charter for Safer Chemicals -- A Platform for Creating a Safe and Healthy Environment through Innovation*

From the city of Louisville to the farthest reaches of the Arctic we are exposed to hazardous industrial, agricultural, and household chemicals and carry these poisons in our bodies. Our air, water and soil, our homes, and the food we eat are all contaminated. Diseases linked to these chemicals are on the rise, including birth defects, infertility, asthma, neurological problems, and some forms of cancer. At the front lines of this chemical assault -- at the fencelines of polluting facilities, in workplaces handling hazardous materials, in pesticide-laden agricultural fields, and in the wombs of mothers -- the burden is greatest. This chemical burden is unprecedented in human history and represents a major failure of the current chemical management system.

Fundamental reform is necessary to protect people, the environment, and the food web. That reform will require a new vision that meets the needs of society while restoring and protecting health and the systems that support us. It will require a transformation in our thinking and a change in the direction of government and market priorities. It will require action to phase out the most dangerous chemicals, to innovate safer alternatives, and to protect high-risk communities.

Cleaner and safer chemicals, products, and production processes are feasible. Leading companies are developing and using these technologies, providing a roadmap for a new approach to production that supports life and health. While innovative companies are adopting new technologies, policy change is necessary to transform entire markets.

A first step to creating a safe and healthy environment is a major reform of our nation's chemicals policy. Any reform must:

- ❑ **Require Safer Substitutes and Solutions** -- seek to eliminate hazardous chemical use and emissions by altering production processes, substituting safer chemicals, redesigning products and systems, and rewarding innovation. Safer substitution includes an obligation on the part of the public and private sectors to invest in research and development for sustainable chemicals, products, materials, and processes.
- ❑ **Phase-out Persistent, Bioaccumulative, or Highly Toxic Chemicals** -- prioritize for elimination chemicals that are slow to degrade, accumulate in fatty tissues, or are highly hazardous to humans or the environment.
- ❑ **Give the Public and Workers the Full Right-To-Know** -- label products that contain hazardous chemicals, list quantities of hazardous chemicals used in agriculture and in manufacturing facilities, and provide public access to safety data on chemicals.
- ❑ **Act on Early Warnings** -- act to prevent harm when credible evidence exists that harm is occurring or is likely to occur, even when some uncertainty remains regarding the exact nature and magnitude of the harm.
- ❑ **Require Comprehensive Safety Data for All Chemicals** -- assume that a chemical is highly hazardous unless comprehensive safety data are available for the chemical and require manufacturers to provide this data by 2015 for a chemical to remain on the market -- this is the principle of "No Data, No Market."
- ❑ **Take Immediate Action to Protect Communities and Workers** - When communities and workers are exposed to levels of chemicals that pose an immediate health hazard, immediate action is necessary to eliminate these exposures.

Implementing these demands is a first step in reforming a 30-year old chemical management system that fails to protect public health and the environment. By implementing the Louisville Charter and committing to the innovation of safer chemicals and processes, the US government and American corporations will be leading the way toward a healthier economy and a healthier society.

* The charter principles were agreed upon in Louisville, Kentucky, USA in May 2004 at the annual meeting of a network of groups and individuals whose common goal is to work together on chemical policies and campaigns to protect human health and the environment from exposures to harmful chemicals.