PCB Chemical Action Plan Overview

DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY
State of Washington

Reducing Toxic Threats **February 2015**

Tackling a toxic legacy

Reducing toxic threats affecting Washington's people and environment is one of Ecology's priorities. Those toxic chemicals that are persistent in the environment and bioaccumulate in people and animals pose the greatest threat and receive special attention. One of these toxics is polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs. PCBs can cause adverse health effects in humans and wildlife including cancer and harm to immune, nervous, and reproductive systems. In 2015, the Washington departments of Ecology and Health released a chemical action plan to guide our state's strategy to find and remove PCBs, and reduce exposures.

From 1929 to 1979, about 600,000 metric tons of PCBs were commercially manufactured in the United States. Although federal law banned PCBs in 1979, there are widespread reservoirs of this toxic chemical in old caulk, electrical transformers, fluorescent light ballasts and paint. In addition, the federal law allowed some historical uses to continue, and set allowable levels of inadvertent production of PCBs in other products, such as in pigments and dyes.

Although a great deal of work has already been done to reduce PCBs, this plan identifies important gaps that need to be filled in order to protect people and the environment. Ecology worked with stakeholders to identify these gaps and prioritize measures to reduce the risk posed by this toxic chemical in Washington.

Recommendations

The departments of Ecology and Health will continue their existing programs, such as cleanup, permitting, stormwater management, and fish advisories. The following recommendations are for new actions in addition to our existing efforts to reduce PCBs.

- Identify PCB-containing lamp ballasts in schools and other public buildings. Encourage replacement with more energy-efficient PCB-free fixtures.
- Develop and promote best management practices (BMPs) to contain PCBs in building materials, both in structures currently in use and those slated for remodel or demolition.
- Assess schools and other public buildings for the presence of PCB-containing building materials.
- Learn more about what products contain PCBs and promote the use of processes that don't inadvertently generate PCBs. Start with an alternatives assessment for pigments and dyes.
- Survey owners of historic electrical equipment to confirm disposal and provide technical assistance.
- Expand environmental monitoring to identify new areas requiring cleanup and investigate air deposition.
- Conduct a public education campaign.
- Conduct a study on PCBs in Washington residents to prioritize future actions.

WHAT IS A CHEMICAL ACTION PLAN?

A chemical action plan identifies, characterizes, and evaluates uses and releases of a chemical, and recommends actions to protect human health and the environment from chemicals that are persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic.

In developing a chemical action plan, Ecology works with stakeholders and reviews all available information and research on a chemical to identify the most effective means to reduce the use of toxics chemicals.

Ecology has already developed chemical action plans for four chemicals:

- Mercury
- Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs)
- Lead
- Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)

More information

http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/pbt/pcb.html

Contact

Holly Davies
(360) 407-7398
Holly.Davies@ecy.wa.gov