

Flame Retardants Remain Under Fire

Minnesota's stalled efforts to expand protections from toxic flame retardants received a boost this fall. Maine became the first state to ban all flame retardants and Rhode Island is the first to ban an entire class of flame retardant chemicals, known as organohalogens, from furniture. This progress paves the way for Minnesota and other states to advance broader bans in 2018.

States are banning larger groups of flame retardants in response to health concerns such as those outlined in a recent public warning from the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). In September, the Commission issued warnings on the hazards of flame retardants to consumers. Manufacturers were advised to stop using the chemicals altogether. This unprecedented action is due to a growing body of scientific studies demonstrating exposure to these chemicals can cause cancer, neurological deficits, and other health problems.

Many common household products are included in the Commission's warning. Consumers are advised to avoid baby and toddler products, furniture, mattresses, and electronics with organohalogen flame retardants. Exposure occurs when these chemicals migrate out of products into indoor air and dust, where the chemicals are either breathed in or ingested. Biomonitoring studies conducted by the Center for Disease Control found most of us have flame retardants in our bodies.



In a vote split narrowly along party lines, the CPSC also approved moving forward with a ban. However, the prospect of a ban being enacted remains uncertain. The Democratic majority on the board will end in November when Commissioner Marietta Robinson's term expires. Since the vacancy will be filled by Presidential appointment, it is unlikely a ban will be enacted and state action will be needed.

Firefighters across the country have advocated for flame retardant bans given their workplace exposure and higher rates of occupational cancer. Flame retardants also do not provide meaningful fire protection and create more toxic smoke when burned. In 2015, Minnesota successfully banned four flame retardants from furniture and children's products. Since then Clean Water Action has continued a partnership with firefighters and allies to advocate for the prohibition of additional flame retardants in household products.

► [Read our Household Furnishings Guide](#) to learn how you can avoid products with flame retardants and support Clean Water Action's efforts at the capitol.

Great Lakes Restoration Conference in Buffalo, NY

In October, Clean Water Action's Water Program Coordinator Steve Schultz joined more than 400 other Great Lakes advocates in Buffalo, NY for the 2017 Great Lakes Restoration Conference. Hosted by the Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition, the conference is the largest annual gathering of Great Lakes supporters and activists. Participants learned about important Great Lakes restoration issues and projects, and developed strategies to advance federal, regional, and local restoration goals for one of our greatest natural treasures, the Great Lakes.

Workshops focused on protecting the lakes as a source of drinking water for more than 40 million people. One session focused on how the Great Lakes region is home to the worst drinking water infrastructure crises — poisonous lead in Flint, water shutoffs in Detroit, and toxic algal blooms in Toledo, are just a few examples.

Another workshop featured activists from Buffalo who spoke about best practices for engaging women, young people, and communities of color while also creating

Niagara Falls: Located on the Niagara River, the falls drain Lake Erie (as well as the water from upstream Great Lakes Superior, Michigan, and Huron) into Lake Ontario.



PHOTO: STEVE SCHULTZ

partnerships, framing issues, and campaign planning. From water quality, access and affordability to jobs, infrastructure, and utilities, we learned from expert women on the front lines of stewardship in the defense of natural resources, community needs, and public interest resources like the Great Lakes.

Both of these presentations emphasized the importance of community involvement in local decisions to protect health and drinking water sources and put drinking water first.

Other topics included efforts to fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, reduce pollution from industrial agriculture that is wreaking havoc on the Great Lakes, and stop the spread of invasive species in the lakes. We are already looking forward to next year's conference that will be held in Detroit, MI.

Governor Dayton's 25% by 2025 Water Quality Town Halls Wrapped Up in October

Earlier this year, Governor Mark Dayton announced his goal to achieve a 25% improvement in water quality by the year 2025. The Governor held ten water town halls across the state, concluding on October 4 in Stillwater. Residents, businesses, government entities, and other stakeholders attending the meetings were asked what they believe a 25% improvement in water quality is, along with what they believe are the best approaches to reach that goal.

Clean Water Action will keep members updated on what comes out of these meetings and on efforts to achieve that lofty goal of improving water quality in Minnesota.



Asking Tough Questions About Minnesota Schools

Each year parents and caregivers prepare for the school year by buying supplies, picking out new backpacks, signing children up for activities, and more. It is easy to forget just how much time children spend in school buildings throughout the year and the multiple aspects of school environments they are exposed to that are cause for concern. Research shows that higher levels of achievement are often related to health and that health problems are connected to hindered performance in school.

Informed families can ensure that schools are prioritizing not only a safe school environment, but a healthier one that promotes health, wellness, and academic achievement by encouraging and holding school officials accountable. Below are important aspects of a school environment that are often overlooked. It is time we start asking the tough questions, because quality education means a quality environment.

Water Quality

Many schools and childcare facilities may or may not be conducting voluntary drinking water testing. Exposure to even low levels of lead in drinking water is a significant health concern. Most lead gets into water after coming into contact with plumbing materials containing lead.



Ask your child's school about their drinking water testing protocol. When was the last time they tested? What were the results? What plan do they have in place for remediation if it is needed?

Chemical Exposure

Chemicals are used throughout schools for a number of purposes, such as routine cleaning, maintenance, and pest management. Improper chemical management poses health and safety risks to children. Exposure to toxic chemicals can cause serious health problems including cancer, nervous system disorders, reproductive disorders, as well as asthma.

Ask your child's school about their chemical management plan and exposure prevention principles. Inquire about whether or not they have an environmentally preferable purchasing policy to minimize use of hazardous chemicals at their school.

Playgrounds and Athletic Fields

Many schools use shredded waste tire as ground cover on playgrounds and as infill on athletic turf fields. Waste tire contains toxic chemicals like arsenic, lead, and other irritants and carcinogens known to negatively impact human health. Due to health concerns, many school districts, like the Los Angeles Unified School District, the City of New York, and Montgomery County, Maryland have banned the use of waste tire products in children's play spaces. Here in Minnesota, both the Duluth School Board and Minneapolis Public Schools have chosen to remove existing waste tire mulch from their playgrounds.

Ask your child's school about the materials used on their playgrounds and athletic fields and what measures they are taking to reduce children's exposure to toxic chemicals during playtime.



Thank you to everyone who came out for the Clean Water Action Fall Fundraiser! Thank you to all of our sponsors, raffle item sponsors and our hosts, the Troubadour Wine Bar, for being part of a great event! It was a wonderful chance to celebrate the work of Clean Water Action, and the work of our Clean Water Action Heroes: Councilman Cam Gordon, Safe Playground leaders Nancy Doyle Brown, Clover Hackett and Dianna Kennedy, and MPCA Commissioner John Linc Stine.

Preventing Chloride from Damaging Minnesota Water

As Minnesotans, we love our waterways — it's part of who we are. For a lot of folks, it's a surprise to hear that our waterways in our cities are getting salty. Thirty nine waterways in the Twin Cities Metro Area are above EPA standards for chloride — a byproduct of salt — including Como Lake, Diamond Lake, Powderhorn Lake, Wirth Lake, Bassett Creek, Battle Creek, Elm Creek, and Minnehaha Creek!

In winter, salt is applied to roads and walkways to melt ice and snow — this is where most of the chloride in our waterways comes from. The salt dissolves, runs into storm drains, and most storm drains go directly into local waterways.

The problem with chloride is that it builds up over time so waterways are getting saltier and saltier every year. About one fifth of chloride ends up draining into the ocean through major waterways, but the vast majority stays in local waterways. That saltiness is hurting aquatic life and the health of our waterways — one of our most valuable resources. Over

time, chloride will work its way into groundwater and other drinking water sources. It's difficult and expensive to remove chloride from tap water.

Prevention is the first step. Shovel and sweep snow and scrape away ice.

The best alternatives are salt-free. Gain traction on slippery surfaces by using sand, coffee grounds, kitty litter, or an outdoor snow/ice carpet.

If you need to use salt, then use no more than 1 pound (about 1 coffee mug full) of salt per 1,000 square feet (about the size of a two car driveway), and make sure you are using the right kind of salt for the temperature. Make sure it's spread evenly and thinly — no big piles or clumps. More salt does not lead to more melting. Excess will just run off into waterways polluting our favorite lakes and rivers.



Minnesota Environmental Fund: The Minnesota Environmental Fund's (MEF) workplace giving programs support Clean Water Fund and more than 20 other respected and responsible nonprofit environmental and conservation organizations. MEF's local workplace giving option connects people to Minnesota's environmental charities through payroll giving and employee engagement. **Ask your employer to be part of MEF today.**



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