

Invisible News

ISSUE 4

BROUGHT to YOU by the GENEVA CHEMICALS & WASTE CLUSTER at the 4th UN Environment Assembly

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CHEMICALS & WASTE in your LOUNGE?

Relax, sit down, at last you're home, safe and sound.....?

But hold on - stop and think for a moment. For the most part, you can't see toxic chemicals, but that doesn't mean they are not there.

The sofa you are sitting feels very comfortable, but is it safe for your health? The lighting in your lounge makes so many things possible, but are your lightbulbs or even your electricity itself - toxic?

Chemicals have given society many benefits, vital to development. The upholstery of furniture often contains chemical additives called flame retardants, which prevent sofas and chairs and carpets from catching fire, an important societal benefit.

But some of these additives, including those known as brominated flame retardants, are also known to be toxic. One such flame retardant, Decabromodiphenyl ether (or DecaBDE) is highly persistent, and affects reproductive and nervous systems as an endocrine disruptor.

Lighting is a basic need. But did you know that many compact fluorescent lightbulbs contain small amounts of mercury, a highly toxic heavy metal that poses a global threat to human health and the environment? Handle such bulbs with care, and replace them with non-mercury alternatives such as LED lamps, which are often not only more environmentally-friendly, but more energy-efficient as well! Check your power source if you can: electricity from coal-burning sources emits mercury into the atmosphere.

Your lounge is likely home to electrical gadgets: mobile phones, TV, video, computers. Did you know electronic waste is burgeoning and that as much as 50 million tonnes is generated per year. Do you know what happens to your old devices, when they become waste, and how it impacts upon peoples' health?



Household furniture typically contains chemical additives intended to prevent domestic items from catching fire; these flame retardants are often toxic to human health and the environment. Do you know what you are sitting on?

Making the Invisible, Visible

The Geneva Chemicals & Waste Cluster is a group of international organisations in Geneva which collectively works to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of chemicals and waste. This lounge installation is brought to you by four organisations of this cluster, namely:

- Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, & Stockholm Conventions (BRS);
- Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury;
- Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM); and
- UN Environment, Chemicals and Health Branch (UNEP)

See www.brsmeas.org www.mercuryconvention.org www.saicm.org and www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste for more info



Your choice of lightbulb affects both your possible exposure to harmful chemicals as well as your likely impact upon the environment. Choose carefully!

Think about the lifecycle of your products, where do they go when you throw them out?

To keep you and your family healthy, seek out the furniture and lighting options which don't include those toxic substances. Alternatives do exist, and they are becoming more and more available.

And when you want to replace your furnishings, lightbulbs, and electronic appliances and gadgets, be careful how you handle them and dispose of them safely and according to local guidance, if at all possible. The Basel Convention offers guidance on how hazardous waste can be safely managed.

Our waste comes back to haunt us. We don't see where it goes, who deals with it, what impacts it has. But since we live in one, interconnected world, we cannot escape our waste. We all need to minimize our waste. Food waste, wasted water, electricity, electronic (e-) waste, household waste in general, and plastics in particular.

Always remember the mantra for minimizing waste, especially when it comes to plastics and electronics: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

What can you do?

- Read the next *Invisible News* sheets to educate yourself about the hazards;
- Visit the websites listed to find out more;
- Seek out safe alternatives when buying food, clothing, furniture and READ the labelling;
- Dispose of your waste responsibly;
- Discuss with your children, relatives, neighbours.



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