

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, TRADE, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION HEARING ENTITLED, "SAFETY OF PHTHALATES AND BISPENOL-A IN EVERYDAY CONSUMER PRODUCTS"

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June 10, 2008

Washington, D.C.

– Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce inserted the following statement into the hearing record this morning at a Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection hearing titled “Safety of Phthalates and Bisphenol-A in Everyday Consumer Products.”

Plastics have been around for millions of years. Plastics are polymers, or simple molecular configurations of carbon and hydrogen atoms that link together repeatedly to make chains. Spiders spin polymer fibers called silk. Trees make cellulose and lignin, also natural polymers. Cotton and rubber are polymers, and humans make the substance in the form of collagen which comprises, for example, our fingernails.

Not

to be outdone by nature, 20th century chemists set about cracking long hydrocarbon chain molecules of crude petroleum into smaller ones, and mixing these fractionates to produce various man-made plastics. We are all familiar with the resulting torrent of products that flooded into general consumption: Styrofoam, nylon, acrylic textiles, Plexiglass, polyethylene bottles, polypropylene containers, rubber polyurethane toys, and self-clinging wraps of polyvinyl chloride and polyethylene, the latter of which let us see the foods wrapped inside and preserve them for a longer period of time.

Man-made plastics

have yielded significant benefits to society and have revolutionized the way we do almost everything. On the other hand, these advances have come with downsides. In the haunting book *The World Without Us*, Alan Weisman describes the ecological damage from plastics. Today’s hearing will examine growing questions about the safety of two chemicals used in everyday plastics. Phthalates are a family of chemicals with more than a dozen individual formulas that are used to make plastics soft. They are used in everything from bathtub mats to toys. Bisphenol-A, or

BPA for short, is a component of polycarbonate plastic used to make it hard and shatter proof. It is used in baby bottles and teething rings but also in bicycle helmets and car safety seats. These components have been around for about 50 years, but recent studies have raised significant concerns about the risks posed by use of these substances in certain consumer products and the impact of these and similar substances on human health, especially where fetuses, infants, and young children are concerned. Consumer groups are asking policymakers to take steps to ban these substances in consumer products.

I want to commend Rep. Darlene Hooley for bringing this issue to the attention of this Committee and requesting a hearing on this matter. She is a valuable Member and her leadership will be missed when she retires at the end of this Congress. I also commend Subcommittee Chairman Rush and Ranking Member Whitfield for honoring the commitment to look into this important issue, and similarly I thank Rep. Schakowsky, for agreeing to chair today's hearing. I thank all of today's witnesses for lending their expertise to today's proceedings and hope that we can count on their input on an ongoing basis. It is extremely important that Congress, with the help of Government and other scientists, adequately assess the hazards posed by phthalates and BPA, and also to determine the safety of alternative chemicals for essential consumer products. Today's hearing is a crucial first step in that process.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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