

## HANDBOOK ON REDUCING CHEMICAL FOOTPRINTS

### Chapter 10. Conclusions



Science greatly expands opportunities available to global citizens. It also creates a cautionary framework. We experiment with new chemical compounds, adding them to products designed to make life easier and to address common challenges. Not all of these formulas prove safe and effective. Scientists have identified many such potentially harmful chemicals. While research continues, heeding the scientific evidence to date is smart.

This handbook recognizes that our individual and collective chemical footprints contain many chemical substances that are associated with negative human health and environmental effects. Several chemicals of concern found in common personal care, household and home gardening products have been singled out in this document. Each of these substances has been identified by scientists as a serious concern, and each has non-toxic or less-toxic alternatives.

We might hope that safeguards already in place will prevent the worst outcomes. Current safeguards include registration of all chemicals in commercial use, product-labeling rules, and water-treatment requirements designed to remove pollutants from the water system. However, there are no guarantees. Currently, chemical registration under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) does not require testing of chemical substances. Most substances have undergone very little systematic analysis of possible short-term and long-term consequences of use. Consumers can find many substances listed on product labels, particularly personal care products, but most household products are exempt from comprehensive listing of all product ingredients. Water treatment systems are effective for the identified list of contaminants requiring measurement, monitoring, and removal. However, current treatment methods do not measure or remove most unregulated chemicals of concern.

The political system can develop innovative environmental policies to protect humans and other species from the harmful effects of development. However, the existing US policy system generally refrains from intervening in the marketplace until harm is proven (i.e., risk-based decision-making). Proof of harm is the goal of scientific research on CECs, but attaining this goal requires intensive time and resources. In the meantime, chemicals suspected of causing harm remain commonly available in many consumer products.

Most effective in reducing chemical footprints is community-based preventive action. Chemical footprint evaluation and response (CFER) is a process designed to encourage individuals and groups to engage in:

- Accounting for all chemicals, both known and hidden, in consumer products.
- Identifying specific chemicals of concern in products being used.
- Committing to a personal chemical footprint reduction plan.
- Taking action to adopt specific alternatives that will reduce use of chemicals of concern.

The goal of this handbook is not to overwhelm but to empower and educate. It explains why we need to reduce our use of products containing chemicals of concern, and how to do it. Individuals, families, businesses, civic groups, governments, watershed alliances, and many others face this growing pollution problem. Addressing it with science-backed prevention will help safeguard the health of humans and other species, now and in the future. We do not have to wait for others. Now is the time to reduce our own chemical footprints.



© 2021 Institute for Environmental Solutions