

Alameda County Early Care & Education Planning Council Statement on Children's Environmental Health

Introduction

The Council believes that all families have the right to the highest quality early care and education (ECE) for their infants through school age children, regardless of where they choose to send their children for out of home care¹. Ensuring child care settings are safe, healthy, and free of harmful contaminants is critical to this vision.

Background

Over 84,000 chemicals have been registered for use in the U.S., but less than 1% have been tested for human safety. The burden of avoiding harmful chemicals falls on consumers, and the burden of exposure disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable citizens, including children, people of lower socio-economic status, and people of color.

Young children are more vulnerable to environmental health hazards because their organs are still developing, they spend time close to the ground where contaminants accumulate, and they have a higher intake of air, water, and food per unit of body weight compared with adults. With more than one million children in California under six years of age attending child care programs and spending the majority of their waking weekday hours, it is critical to minimize environmental contaminants in child care facilities.

There is a broad set of chemicals common in child care settings that can disrupt healthy development, resulting in lifelong increases in cancer risk, decreased fertility, asthma, obesity, or learning and developmental disorders. Chemicals of concern include flame retardants, antimicrobials, bisphenols (like BPA) and phthalates, heavy metals, fluorinated stain/water/oil resistant treatments, formaldehyde and other Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), and polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Due to inadequate or nonexistent limits on harmful chemicals in consumer products, child care programs can expose children to harmful chemicals. Providers do not intend to expose children to these chemicals, but can do so unknowingly when making decisions because they lack information.

¹ Alameda County ECE Planning Council Statement on High Quality ECE Principles and Standards. Approved by the Planning Council Steering Committee September 18, 2009.

Where chemicals of concern can be found in child care settings:

- Art supplies
- Building / construction materials
- Carpets
- Cleaners, sanitizers, disinfectants, and soaps
- Food and water sources
- Food service supplies
- Furniture
- Nap mats
- Office products
- Paint
- Pesticides
- Playground materials
- Toys

Position

The Council endorses *A Blueprint for Protecting Children's Environmental Health: An Urgent Call to Action* by the Children's Environmental Health Network². The Blueprint emphasizes urgent action to make children's health a priority for our nation. It outlines the steps that are necessary for progress towards protecting children's environmental health, and for developing a solid foundation to support future commitments moving forward. It is a high-level resource that is available to assist leaders in our communities and the children's environmental health field in prioritizing the needs of our children.

To achieve the vision laid out in the Blueprint, the unique characteristics of child care programs will need to be considered locally. It will take a dedicated, coordinated effort to protect children's health in the face of multiple environmental health threats. The Council **supports policies, practices, and partnerships that promote environmentally healthy early care and education settings**, and ultimately support children's health, readiness to learn, and ability to thrive.

² A Blueprint for Protecting Children's Environmental Health: An Urgent Call to Action. Children's Environmental Health Network. October 2015. <http://cehn.org/our-work/blueprint-for-protecting-childrens-health/>.