

## **Toxic Chemicals in Everyday Life - House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee**

A recent survey by the Environmental Audit Committee, that was commissioned by the UK government, to look into how chemicals are impacting the UK population has been published. The government is accused, by the committee, of stalling on action to reduce exposure to toxic chemicals in homes. The summary of the committee's report is published below.

Chemicals are pervasive in modern society and contribute to improved health and quality of life globally. However, current regulation does not account for the cocktail of chemicals we are exposed to. Hazardous chemicals and other pollutants are now 'ubiquitous in humans and the environment.

Without a rapid transition to a more circular economy for chemicals, it will not be possible to implement the ambitions set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan or Resources and Waste Strategy.

We call on the Government to use the forthcoming Chemicals Strategy to form the basis of a non-toxic environment in the UK. This should set out a clear, ambitious vision for the type of chemical environment we hope to live in.

We need to better understand which chemicals we are exposed to in greatest measure and what the risk from that exposure is. To do this, a long-term, UK wide, human and wildlife biomonitoring programme should be established.

The Chemicals Strategy should include objectives and priority areas for monitoring. It should also consider the mixtures of chemicals we are exposed to and lay out a plan for the remediation of harmful regulated substances in the environment.

The 1988 Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations have been under review for ten years with no reforms enacted. During this time, some of the most commonly used flame retardants have been classed as persistent organic pollutants and substances of very high concern. Inaction has allowed unnecessary and potentially toxic chemicals to continue to enter the public's homes. Our Regulations should be brought in line with the rest of the world and the Government should develop a new flammability standard without further delay.

Children's products should be immediately removed from scope of the Regulations. Labels should clearly state if a furniture product has been treated with chemical flame retardants. It is clear that the Regulations are contested and there is no consensus; however, it is unacceptable a government department can take nearly three years to respond to a public consultation.

The Minister must publish the responses before a new Prime Minister takes office on 24 July. Failure to do so will add to the view that the process is being deliberately delayed.

We are troubled by the lack of urgency in response to findings of environmental contamination from chemicals around the Grenfell Tower site. Residents should be reassured that the presence of these chemicals is not harmful to their health and homes.

We support calls for full health biomonitoring for residents, including specific monitoring for the effects of exposure to fire effluents. We also recommend that any local residents who have concerns about dusts or residues within their homes be offered the opportunity to have them tested for environmental contamination. Environmental contamination testing for chemicals should be carried out as standard in the immediate aftermath of major disasters.

Chemicals are routinely used in consumer products where their presence is not indicated on the product label. Consumers have the right to know what chemicals are used in the products they purchase. The current budget for product safety compliance does not reflect the volume of products on the market and is failing to protect UK consumers.

The Government should increase resources for product safety compliance by 10 percent a year in the upcoming spending review. Product labelling should be reformed to ensure consumers are aware of which groups of chemicals have been used. This should include domestic pictograms to indicate if a substance meets the criteria for a substance of very high concern. A full list of chemical ingredients should be made available on the product website and direction offered to independent, scientific

advice. Public Health Bodies should be given responsibility for monitoring, researching the impact of chemicals on public health, and recommending restrictions and other controls on groups of problematic chemicals. They should be given adequate funding and staffing for research and policy development.

And check out the government web page which includes more details at:

<https://tinyurl.com/y4f6hyfr>

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## Good News At Christmas for Choc Lovers!!



### People who eat dark chocolate are less likely to be depressed

A recent study, published in *Depression and Anxiety*, is the first to examine the association with depression according to the type of chocolate consumed.

Researchers from UCL worked in collaboration with scientists from the University of Calgary and Alberta Health Services Canada and assessed data from 13,626 adults from the US National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

Participants' chocolate consumption was assessed against their scores on the Patient Health Questionnaire, which assesses depressive symptoms.

It was found that individuals who reported eating any dark chocolate in two 24-hour periods had 70 per cent lower odds of reporting clinically relevant depressive symptoms than those who reported not eating chocolate at all.

The 25 per cent of chocolate consumers who ate the most chocolate (of any kind, not just dark) were also less likely to report depressive symptoms than those who didn't eat chocolate at all.

However researchers found no significant link between any non-dark chocolate consumption and clinically relevant depressive symptoms.

Lead author Dr Sarah Jackson (UCL Institute of Epidemiology & Health Care) said: "This study provides some evidence that consumption of chocolate, particularly dark chocolate, may be associated with reduced odds of clinically relevant depressive symptoms".

<https://tinyurl.com/yxptoqju>