

# KAISER PERMANENTE

## FINDING SAFER ALTERNATIVES TO HARMFUL CHEMICALS

Exposure to toxic chemicals in everyday life has increasingly become a health concern. More than 80,000 chemicals are used in commerce today, and only a small fraction has been tested for effects on human health. There is growing evidence that environmental exposures to some chemicals contribute to cancer, asthma, reproductive disorders and other health impacts.

Kaiser Permanente is committed to researching and sourcing safer alternatives to products used in health care settings such as cleaners, solvents, disinfectants, plastics used in medical devices and building materials, flame retardants and formaldehyde.

We promote safer alternatives to harmful chemicals in four ways:

- Sourcing products with safer ingredients
- Adding to the body of knowledge through research into health effects of chemical exposures
- Informing public policy and decision-making pertaining to safer chemical use
- Collaborating with other major health care systems and non-governmental organizations to accelerate improvements in safer chemical use throughout the health care sector

### Sourcing Safer Products

In 2006, Kaiser Permanente created an Environmental Purchasing Policy in support of its social mission to improve the health of its members and the communities it serves. The policy requires that the principles of environmentally preferred purchasing be applied to all major purchasing decisions.

To further embed these principles in its decision-making process, Kaiser Permanente developed the Sustainability Scorecard in 2010 as a way to rate medical supplies on how eco-friendly and non-toxic they are. The scorecard is the first of its kind for health care and enables us to better choose products that reduce environmental and human health impacts while also encouraging our suppliers to increase their offerings of eco-friendly supplies.

With coordination by Practice Greenhealth, Kaiser Permanente made the Sustainability Scorecard available to the health care industry's largest group purchasing organizations (GPOs) representing an estimated \$135 billion in annual purchasing volume. This significant leveraging power is helping to advance an economy where the production and use of chemicals are not harmful for humans or the environment.

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### Adding to the Body of Knowledge

Kaiser Permanente also supports safer chemicals through research. Our Division of Research frequently conducts research studies evaluating the health impacts of exposure to chemicals. One such study, which focused on factory workers and was published in the journal *Human Reproduction*, was the first research study to demonstrate detrimental effects upon the male reproductive system of humans exposed to high levels of Bisphenol-A, or BPA. Kaiser Permanente publicizes findings such as these to add to the body of knowledge of health impacts of exposures to harmful chemicals.

### Informing Public Policy

Kaiser Permanente recognizes the importance of engaging in public policy work in order to advance an economy where chemicals used in commerce are not harmful to humans or the environment. Kaiser Permanente's environmental stewardship officer, Kathy Gerwig, has testified before U.S. Senate and House committees and in hearings held in California about Kaiser Permanente's efforts to curb the use of potentially toxic chemicals.

### Collaborating for Safer Chemicals

To foster greater environmental performance across the entire health care sector, Kaiser Permanente regularly collaborates with governmental and non-profit organizations in order to increase public awareness and promote public dialogue around the importance of environmental stewardship and its impacts on creating healthy communities.

Kaiser Permanente is a strategic partner and member of Practice Greenhealth and Health Care Without Harm, working to advance the mission and goals of greening the health care sector through sharing of experiences and best practices. We are also a founding member of the Healthier Hospitals Initiative, a collaboration of major health systems and non-governmental organizations working collectively to accelerate improvements in the sector's environmental footprint.

The following examples illustrate Kaiser Permanente's success in sourcing safer products:

- Rigid endoscopes that use steam instead of chemical sterilization eliminating the use of 17,000 cassettes of chemicals annually.
- PVC-free carpet that is made from recycled content and fully recyclable
- DEHP-free resuscitation bags and laryngeal masks.
- PVC-free and DEHP-free patient-controlled analgesia sets that eliminates over 18.8 miles of PVC tubing per year.
- Collaborated with the marketplace to develop new adult and neonatal therapeutic surfaces that eliminate chemicals of concern such as halogenated flame retardants, bisphenol A and polyvinyl chloride.
- Identified and sourced safer alternatives to infant skin care products that eliminate chemicals of concern in shampoo, baby wash and lotions.

