

Current regulations miss toxic pollution coming from everyday products

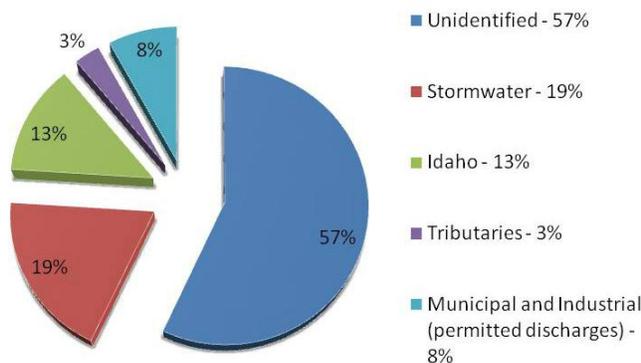
The risk from toxic chemicals doesn't begin with a leaking drum of hazardous waste. It begins when we make products that contain toxic chemicals. Much of the pollution that enters our environment comes from the small but steady releases of toxic chemicals contained in everyday products such as the brakes on our cars, flame retardants in our furniture, softeners in plastics, and metals in roofing materials.

Our current framework does not deal with toxic chemicals in a comprehensive way. From the federal Clean Water Act to Washington's dangerous waste laws, our pollution and water quality regulations focus mainly on the end-of-pipe disposal of spent toxic chemicals from industrial manufacturers and wastewater dischargers.

In Washington, hundreds of businesses and facilities are required to follow regulations to safely manage their used toxic chemicals. However, the toxic chemicals found in the everyday products used by Washington's 6.7 million residents are largely unregulated, yet make up the largest source of toxic pollution.

Consider the following chart looking at the sources of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, in the Spokane River. PCB levels in the river are so high, the Washington Department of Health advises people not to eat fish along some sections of the river. But only 8 percent of the PCBs come from permitted wastewater sources, like factories and sewage treatment plants. The rest come from widespread sources such as failing light ballasts and old caulk, entering the river through stormwater and other pathways.

Sources of PCBs in the Spokane River



THE GOVERNOR'S PLAN

Governor Jay Inslee is proposing a comprehensive toxics reduction initiative to deal with toxics entering the environment from everyday sources. As part of his plan to update Washington's water quality standards to comply with the federal Clean Water Act, Gov. Inslee is proposing new legislation and additional funding for existing efforts to tackle these widespread toxics.

The toxics reduction initiative will allow Washington to address the most problematic chemicals, find safer alternatives when possible, and devote more resources to preventing pollution and monitoring the health of our environment.

This approach builds on Washington's well-established system for developing chemical action plans, and will bring together stakeholders to recommend actions to reduce or eliminate use of priority toxic chemicals.

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Industrial discharges are a small slice of the pollution pie

PCBs are far from the only toxic chemical coming from everyday sources. In many cases, ordinary products contain minute amounts of a toxic chemical. One shoe or one sheet of paper doesn't pose much of a threat, but the chemicals in millions of those products can collectively have a big impact.

And it's not just salmon or orca whales, although they are at risk. Human health can also be impacted by these toxics. The National Academy of Sciences estimates that one in four developmental disorders is caused in part by environmental factors, while one in 30 is due solely to a toxic environmental exposure.

The charts below look at how much of three common chemical pollutants in Puget Sound come from everyday sources.



Copper

Everyday sources: Lawn and garden pesticides, plumbing fixtures, vehicle brake pads, antifouling boat paint, tires.

Industrial sources: Military bases are the largest source of copper releases.

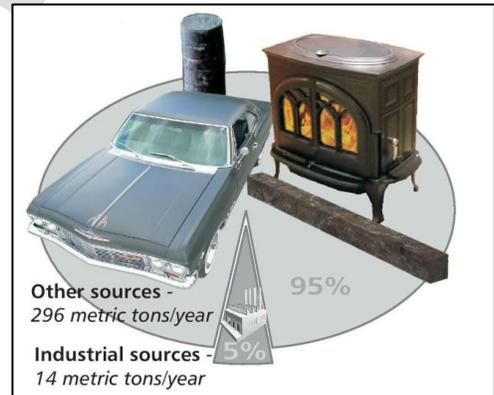
Toxicity: Copper affects salmon's sense of smell, making them vulnerable to predators and unable to return to their birth streams.

PAH (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons)

Everyday sources: Creosote pilings, railroad ties, wood burning, utility poles, vehicle emissions.

Industrial sources: 96 percent of industrial PAH releases come from air emissions from pulp and paper mills, and aluminum mills.

Toxicity: A byproduct of combustion, PAHs can cause cancer, heart defects, and suppress the immune system.



Phthalates

Everyday sources: plastics, PVC hoses, paints, shoe soles, PVC flooring.

Industrial sources: 99 percent of industrial phthalate releases come from air emissions from manufacturing products such as plastics, paint and coatings, boats, and chemical distribution. None of these industrial sources is permitted.

Toxicity: Used to soften plastics, phthalates have been linked to developmental and reproductive problems in humans and animals.

