

**Public Statement for Environmental Health News (EHN) Conference
Sunday, August 27, 2012**

Help get toxic chemicals linked to asthma and birth defects out of school supplies sold in NYC stores!

Join Senator Chuck Schumer, the Center for Health, Environment & Justice, WE ACT for Environmental Justice, concerned parents, and other NYC environmental health advocates to shine the light on toxic chemicals in children's school supplies this back to school season!

WHAT: We'll be hosting a news conference this Sunday at 11 AM to release a major new report on toxic phthalates found in children's back to school supplies, along with a guide to safer school supplies, to educate parents about these hidden toxic hazards, and push for the passage of the national Safe Chemicals Act being considered by Congress.

Featured speakers at Sunday's news conference will include:

- Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY);
- Mike Schade, Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ);
- Dr. Jalonne L. White-Newsome, WE ACT for Environmental Justice (WE ACT)
- Dr. Maya Shetreat Klein, Pediatric Neurologist; and
- Penelope Jagessar Chaffer, Director of Toxic Baby

WHEN: This Sunday, August 26 – 11 AM

WHERE: Outside of Kmart, 250 W. 34th Street (between 7th and 8th Ave).

Dr. Jalonne L. White-Newsome, comments

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to be a part of the release of the Back to School Guide for PVC free school supplies. My name is Jalonne White-Newsome and I am a federal policy analyst with WE ACT for Environmental Justice, a community based environmental and environmental health advocacy organization that helps elevate the voices and concerns of low-income and/or communities of color on a range of issues – one of those issues being toxic chemicals.

As a public health researcher, a former chemical engineering and a mom to two beautiful little girls, the findings in this report are startling. AS a mom, you want to do everything in your power to protect your children from harm, and give them the best quality of life possible. So a

couple of weeks ago when my girls and I went shopping for school supplies, the Back to School guide for PVC free supplies would have been really useful. It was even more upsetting that the binders, the book bags that we were so excited to purchase are hazardous to my girls health b/c of the presence of toxic chemicals like phthalates and others. But I would say the difference is, in my case, is that I am fortunate enough to have a choice. I can take back the toxic products we purchased, jump in my car, or hop on the internet and buy “PVC free materials” for my girls to enjoy. But, that’s not the case for some mom’s and some families that may not have the knowledge, the resources or the access to less toxic products.

Let’s talk about knowledge: how many people in the communities we represent know that the plastics in the supplies they bought their children, or the flooring or the cosmetics they use, are putting their health and their children’s health at risk? What other choices do these families have, if the only stores that are in abundance and found on every other corner, are the low end stores, dollar stores or 99 cent stores that sell these toxic products – if they can’t get to an LL Bean or a Whole Foods – they are out of luck. They are stuck with using household cleaners, supplies and many other products that are an unlikely source of health problems and quality of life issues that could alter a child’s life forever.

WE ACT has had collaborated on research with the Columbia Children’s Environmental Health Center specifically looking at pregnant mothers and children in Washington Heights and South Bronx; other studies show that Black and Dominican mothers and their exposures to higher levels of phthalates from the air, the cosmetics and other sources in their homes. Because we know exposure can be higher for mothers and children in communities of color, and we also know that as a result of these pre-natal exposures to phthalates, babies spend shorter time in the womb; and, once these babies are born, they can potentially have development delays and other behavioral issues as they progress from an infant to a toddler stages. In addition to the effects on children, some studies are now making the link between Blacks and Mexican Americans living in poverty, exposures and diabetes and asthma.

So, as I was trying to explain this concern with toxic chemicals to my husband and the reason why general exposure to these toxic chemicals is not good, but the fact that it is especially not good for low income , communities of color, I used an example from the Olympics. My girls and I watched the Olympics for the first time this summer – and one of my favorite competitions is the hurdles in the track & field.

What I told him is that, just looking at the track, all the runners look the same – similar uniforms, similar gym shoes, and they all have the same size hurdles laid out in their lanes in front of them, leading to the finish line. So, those hurdles are the physical barriers that we can see – that are visible. But what you don’t know, are the “invisible barriers” that each of these athletes had to

overcome. It could be injuries, it could be asthma, and it could be generational health problems that were the result of pollution and other toxic exposures from their home county.

So the race is different for every runner...just like the 'race' is different for every child. The race for a child in a clean, non-toxic environment is different than the 'race' for a child that is dealing with daily exposures from disproportionate amounts of air pollution, disproportionate amounts of lead exposure and other unhealthy living conditions, and lacking the resources to manage the asthma or any other health conditions that they may be living with. The race for low income communities of color becomes THAT much harder when you add on – to a number of existing harmful and toxic exposures – the disproportionate access and exposure to toxic products and toys that are available in their communities.

So how do we make it a fair race? We make sure that the findings from this study and the Back to School guide are shared with communities of color and translated to meet the needs of our most at-risk populations. We replace dangerous chemicals with healthy, low toxic alternatives. And we continue to push for broad changes in chemical policy, especially in consumer products. Back to School time should be a fun time – and buying a binder, a book bag or a lunch box should be hazardous to our children's health.

Thank you for your time.