

A once-in-a-generation opportunity to protect Canadians from toxics

What is CEPA...

There has been a significant shift in sources of pollution in Canada in recent decades. Canadians and the environment are now increasingly exposed to toxic substances in everyday products such as cosmetics and household goods. The *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999* (CEPA) is the law that governs the assessment of risks posed by chemical substances and enables the government to manage these risks through bans, restrictions, and regulations.

Canadians need stronger protections from toxic chemicals

CEPA is not sufficiently equipped to deal with the nature of chemicals and their risks today, leaving Canadians' health and our shared environment inadequately protected. Some of the limitations of the Act include:

- CEPA does not consistently consider children, pregnant women, and other at-risk groups and communities who are more vulnerable to the effects (for biological, geographical or economic reasons) of toxics from products and the environment.
- Endocrine-disrupting (hormone-disrupting) chemicals such as bisphenol A and phthalates are everywhere and can have significant health effects at very low doses because they mimic natural hormones in our bodies. These chemicals have challenged traditional concepts in toxicology that act as the basis for the risk assessments required by CEPA.
- Under CEPA a chemical can be declared toxic but then remain in products for many years before its use is reduced or managed. Even when restrictions are adopted, they may only address a fraction of the consumer products or sources of release into the environment. For example, BPA was banned from baby bottles in 2010, and despite growing evidence on health and environmental effects and calls from Canadians for a complete ban, it's still allowed in food cans and receipts.
- No one is exposed to just one chemical, by the time most people are done their morning routine they may have been exposed to over 100 chemicals from personal care products alone. CEPA does not require assessing cumulative or additive risks or examining safer alternative chemicals to harmful ones.

Key priorities and recommendations

Canadians and the environment need better protection from the harmful effects of toxic chemicals. The federal government can fix CEPA by adopting the following recommendations:

1. Recognize the right to a healthy, non-toxic environment for Canadians and ensure strong protection of vulnerable populations including children, pregnant women, and indigenous communities.
2. Strengthen Canada's chemicals assessment approach to address cumulative and additive exposures to toxic chemicals, and to better address the risk of endocrine-disrupting chemicals.
3. Ensure better and faster management of toxic substances by:
 - a) Mandating the review of substances when new science or data on impacts emerge and when bans or substantial restrictions occur in other jurisdictions such as the U.S. or Europe.
 - b) Requiring quick regulatory action (e.g. bans or restrictions) when a chemical is declared toxic.
 - c) Exploring and promoting safer alternatives to toxic chemicals used in products and goods.
4. Require the government to ban those substances of very high concern from use unless they can be proven safe for the proposed use.
5. Require mandatory labelling of all consumer products containing toxic substances or chemicals suspected of causing adverse health effects including cancer, birth defects, reproductive harm, and allergic reactions.



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