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Goldman, Lynn. "Sound Chemicals Management: An Overview of this Issue." *Sustainable Development Law & Policy*, Spring 2006, 2-3.

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SOUND CHEMICALS MANAGEMENT:

AN OVERVIEW OF THIS ISSUE

by Lynn Goldman*

The world in which we live has changed tremendously from that of previous generations. Synthetic chemicals are ubiquitous in our environment worldwide, and traces of these compounds are found in all humans and animals. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Human Exposure Report has amply demonstrated that such chemicals are often pervasive, appearing in the vast majority of blood and urine samples taken at random from the general population in the United States. Many chemicals are readily passed across the placenta to the fetus or to the infant via breast milk.

Worldwide, around 15,000 new chemicals are introduced every year. In the United States, at least 75,000 industrial chemicals are currently produced or imported.¹ Public concern has risen due to various studies linking hazardous chemicals to increased occurrences of cancer, respiratory diseases, reproduc-

tive disease, impairment in the physical and emotion development of children, neurological disease, and more. New substances are continuously introduced into domestic and global markets, and the impacts of many of these substances are unknown. For example, there is a growing number of nanomaterials that are entering the market with little regulation or data; many of these are likely to have hazardous properties.

Children and their health should be the focus of our domestic and worldwide chemicals policies: children are our future and we need to assign a high value to preserving their potential health and productivity. Pound for pound, children eat more food, drink more water, and breathe more air than adults. Thus, they are likely to be more exposed to substances in their environment than are adults.

In the United States, environmental chemicals are regulated in numerous ways. Pollutants, pesticides, consumer products, and industrial chemicals are each under different statutory and

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regulatory guidance and frameworks. To properly regulate chemicals, the United States needs to strengthen domestic regulations and build up global interrelationships.

A number of international, global, and regional agreements have been developed to assist with chemicals management. The enormity and complexity of this issue has led many nations to accept the idea that harmonization is necessary to properly manage chemicals. Chemicals do not acknowledge political boundaries; thus, regulation must occur at the global level.

Chemical regulation needs to occur in the context of cooperation on an international scale to protect children's health. In some ways, a high degree of worldwide cooperation on chemical assessment and safety already exists. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Chemicals Forum has developed an internationally harmonized

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set of guidelines for chemicals testing, an agreement on good laboratory practices, and an agreement on mutual acceptance of data that allows all nations to adopt these agreements.

This issue of *Sustainable Development Law & Policy* examines efforts to promote sound chemicals management at the domestic and global scale. Contributors to this issue discuss the next steps for chemicals regulation within the United States. Articles encourage assessing and tackling the new risk posed by nanotechnology. The establishment and implications of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management is analyzed, and the status of the Basel Convention is explored. Chemical regulation in the European Union is examined, along with a proposal for an independent entity to manage global chemicals agreements and protocols.

As a whole, these articles address the broad range of issues and possible solutions in chemicals management. The concerns, ideas, and possible solutions identified in this issue highlight the obstacles that many individuals in the global community feel are of the utmost importance to protect environmental public health. In the end, it is important to remember that chemicals policies should be action-oriented and employ approaches that are sufficiently protective to provide assurances that we are acting cautiously to protect our children, future generations, and the environment.



¹ U.S. EPA Web site, <http://www.epa.gov/region5/defs/html/tsca.htm>.