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Public Interest Groups Ask Government To Ban Common Household Products Containing Controversial Germ-Fighting Ingredient

Public interest groups today petitioned the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ban the antibacterial agent triclosan in household products because of evidence that it causes health and environmental effects and leads to antibiotic resistance. The chemical, marketed widely to protect children from germs, is found in antibacterial soaps, deodorants, toothpastes, cosmetics, fabrics and plastics.

Washington, DC, October 25, 2005 – Concerned about health effects, public health and environmental groups today asked FDA to pull from the market widely used household products that contain the germ fighting chemical triclosan. Scientific studies dispute the need for the chemical and link its widespread use to health and environmental effects and the development of stronger bacteria that are increasingly difficult to control. The groups are asking FDA to recognize the urgency of the problem and expedite action to ban household triclosan use after an FDA advisory panel found last week that the chemical provides no additional health protection than soap and water.

Jay Feldman, Executive Director of Beyond Pesticides, the lead petitioner, said, "The failure to regulate triclosan as the law requires puts millions of people and the environment at unnecessary risk to toxic effects and elevated risk to other bacterial diseases."

Senior National Institutes for Health scientist (retired) in microbiology and immunology and widely published in his field, Cecil Fox, Ph.D., stated, "I am troubled that governmental review of triclosan has failed to scrutinize the development of resistant microorganisms (and the by-product, antibiotic-resistant microbial populations), and the transport and accumulation of triclosan residues through skin and mucosal absorption. FDA's failure is a national scandal," Dr. Fox said.

"With enormous medical concern about antibiotic resistant disease, doctors will tell you that nothing beats good old soap and water," said Michael Green, Executive Director of the Center for Environmental Health. "FDA's inaction on triclosan is short-sighted; the agency needs to take a longer view towards protecting public health and the environment."

The household use of triclosan results in contamination of the nation's waterways, according to the petition, with triclosan among the most prevalent contaminants not removed by typical wastewater treatment plants. William Arnold, Ph.D. Associate Professor, University of Minnesota, Department of Civil Engineering, explained, "Upon triclosan exposure to sunlight, two of the products generated are 2,8-dichlorodibenzodioxin and 2,4-dichlorophenol. If triclosan was exposed to chlorine and then sunlight, there is the potential for more highly chlorinated products to be produced."

The petitioners include Beyond Pesticides, Center for Environmental Health, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Breast Cancer Action, Breast Cancer Fund, Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, Citizens Environmental Coalition, Environmental Health Fund, Indigenous Environmental Network, Natural Resources Defense Council, Maryland Pesticide Network, Northwest Indiana Toxics Action Project, San Diego Oceans Foundation, Women's Voices for the Earth, and the organic retailer Seventh Generation, Inc.

The petition and background is posted at <http://www.beyondpesticides.org>.