

Addressing Chemical Exposures Through Policy and Market Based Campaigns

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Founded in 1992, Breast Cancer Fund is the only national organization focused solely on preventing breast cancer by identifying and eliminating the environmental causes of the disease.

Part of our work as advocates for prevention is to look at everyday chemical exposures that may be linked to breast cancer. The public is inundated with the message that “prevention is early detection.” Yet, more and more scientific evidence is linking increasing rates of breast cancer and other diseases to increased chemical exposures. Making these linkages understandable to the general public is best accomplished in a context that is easily understandable.

The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics uses a market based campaign as well as a legislative strategy to seek reform of the largely unregulated cosmetics industry. It is also a useful and approachable way to talk about chemicals in consumer products that may be linked to cancer and cancer prevention. Through the work of the campaign, the public is being educated about toxic chemicals that are in the products they use every day. The Campaign also empowers the public to practice prevention in their daily lives while creating activists who are willing to speak out about unacceptable chemical exposures and demand greater corporate and government protections and accountability.

Policy initiatives such as the California Environmental Contaminant Biomonitoring Program put the spotlight on everyday chemical exposures. Biomonitoring is a process by which different biological specimens are analyzed for the presence of toxic chemicals. Most people have no idea that chemicals are accumulating in their bodies and that these chemicals – and their chemical body burden -- can now be measured. Biomonitoring engages policy makers and the public in a dialogue not only about the safety of chemicals but also about the effects of low dose exposures to chemicals, the importance of looking at the timing of exposure to chemicals, the cumulative impacts of exposure over time and the synergistic effects that chemicals can have with each other.

Key messages:

When discussing chemical exposures, it is important to make the information easily understandable and accessible to the general public.

Many diverse constituencies are affected by increased chemical exposure and it is important to join forces with other environmental health and justice organizations.

Coalition work often produces a more powerful effect than just working alone.

Policy and market based campaigns can be used as powerful media advocacy tools. Press coverage associated with these campaigns can generate meaningful public education about the links between chemical exposures and breast cancer.