

## Cape Cod Times

### Support Safer Alternatives Bill

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The U.S. has the highest breast cancer rate in the world. Massachusetts has one of the highest breast cancer rates in the nation, and women on Cape Cod suffer from a 20 percent higher rate than elsewhere in the state.

In the 1950s, most estimates indicate that about 1 in 20 women would receive a breast cancer diagnosis in her lifetime. Today, in Massachusetts, this number has grown to one in seven or eight.

The Newton-based Silent Spring Institute's Cape Cod Breast Cancer and the Environment Program, along with international research, are finding that many ingredients in cosmetics, body care products, pesticides, hormone-fed meat and dairy, plastics, vehicle and industrial emissions, as well as some pharmaceutical drugs, have known or probable factors that create or support the development of breast cancer in animals and/or in humans.

Independent researchers now estimate that at least 90 percent of all breast cancer incidents is nongenetic and thus feasibly preventable.

Just being overweight or sedentary, when you are post menopausal, can increase your risk of developing breast cancer by up to 20 percent. Our fat cells become a woman's main generator of estrogen once she becomes post-menopausal, with free estrogen the big culprit in most post-menopausal breast cancers.

Meanwhile, most of these carcinogenic toxins in pesticides, foods, cleaning agents and in air and water pollution, such as parabens and phthalates, are fat-loving substances that turn our excess body fat into toxic storage facilities.

The EPA, as described in a recent Supreme Court decision, would prefer not to regulate greenhouse gases because of some residual uncertainty. Hence the chance we can depend on the EPA to take a leadership role in stricter safe chemicals legislation seems remote.

It was therefore a relief last month when advocates representing a coalition of labor, medical and environmental groups, along with leading medical and chemical researchers came together to testify on Beacon Hill about the pressing need for a statewide safe chemicals law.

This proposed legislation, known as the Safer Alternatives Act, would require manufacturers to create a system that phases out the worst toxic chemicals from the environment, by removing them from the workplace and from consumer products, when safer alternatives are available.

The European Union, concerned with their own rising breast cancer rates and other environmental health problems, recently passed two pieces of legislation, which some are calling breast cancer prevention laws. The first makes it illegal to sell cosmetics or body care products containing hormone disrupters, such as parabens or phthalates, and other categories of toxic ingredients throughout Europe.

The second law has similar goals as the proposed Massachusetts safe chemicals legislation.

Both of these European laws, along with our proposed state bill, are based on something called the precautionary principle, or the better-safe-than-sorry rule. This means that until a manufacturer scientifically proves that a product or a specific ingredient is safe, it is considered to be unsafe and cannot go to market.

This is the third legislative session to consider this Safer Alternatives Bill. In past years, industry opposition has succeeded in blocking the bill from even moving out of committee for a floor vote. This session, however, with thoughtful leadership from the House, the Senate and from the state Department of Environmental Protection, those of us concerned about Cape Cod's and the rest of the state's unnecessary breast cancer epidemic finally have hopes for success.

Opponents of the law, including the Massachusetts Chemical and Technology Alliance, the American Chemistry Council and The Associated Industries of Massachusetts, were also on Beacon Hill last month. The Medical Device Industry Council and medical device makers testified that many

of their soft plastic blood bags and other medical devices might be banned, since these bags contain DEHP, a plasticizer within the category of phthalates.

Supporters of the bill, however, say that these bags would not be declared illegal under the law, unless a safer alternative can be found. Studies show that phthalates from the vinyl bags can easily leach into the fluids. Considered a hormonal disrupter, DEHP, when absorbed by the body, acts like free estrogen and can irritate breast cells, which can enhance the growth of developing cancer cells.

It is ironic that the American Cancer Society remains silent about this bill. Although the society is charged with educating the American population on the prevention, detection and treatment of breast and other cancers, the organization has historically been unwilling to bite the biggest hands that feed them. Supported by hundreds of millions of dollars in annual donations from the chemical and cosmetics industries, and run by a board that strongly represents the interests of the radiation, surgical and pharmaceutical industries, the American Cancer Society avoids discussing environmental causes of breast cancer.

Massachusetts women, especially those on the Cape, face some of the highest breast cancer rates in the world, yet the EPA and the American Cancer Society continue to virtually ignore breast cancer prevention. In this surreal situation, the very least our state officials can do is to pass this thoughtful and life-saving Safer Alternatives Bill.

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