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New California Environmental Health Program Will Measure Pollution in People

Schwarzenegger Approves First-in-Nation Statewide Biomonitoring Program; Says Number of Chemicals People are Exposed to Daily Goes "On and On and On"

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A new program to launch the nation's first statewide effort to measure human exposure to toxic chemicals linked to diseases such as cancer and asthma was signed into law by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger today.

The bill is SB 1379, the California Environmental Contaminant Biomonitoring Program.

Senate President pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland) and Sen. Deborah Ortiz (D-Sacramento) authored the measure. It will establish a statewide, voluntary and confidential program to measure chemical contaminants in people. The bill is sponsored by the nonprofit environmental health groups Breast Cancer Fund and Commonweal.

"Biomonitoring is about the triumph of knowledge and science over ignorance," said Jeanne Rizzo, R.N., executive director of the Breast Cancer Fund. "A statewide biomonitoring program will help us find out what we need to know to protect public health so that serious diseases such as breast cancer can ultimately be prevented from occurring in the first place."

The approved program will:

- Produce a statistically-significant statewide report on environmental chemical exposure among Californians and in future years conduct smaller, localized community-based studies. This gives the state the ability to track statewide exposure trends over time, and to look at communities of concern;
- Prioritize chemicals for inclusion in studies based on scientific criteria;
- Allow individual study contributors to receive results if they choose, subject to the guidelines and protocols of the Institutional Review Board of the Department of Health Services;
- Be guided by a nine-member scientific panel appointed by the governor and the Legislature.

The program could begin as early as 2007.

Before he signed the bill at a Capitol press conference this morning, Schwarzenegger underscored the pressing need to undertake such an effort.

"There are literally thousands of chemicals being used in our everyday products in the United States, if it is cleaning supplies, if it is pesticides or if it is makeup products that we are using. The list goes on and on and on," he said. "It is important to know more about how those chemicals build up in our bodies and they may affect our health. Biomonitoring would do exactly that by shedding some light on our bodies, our environment and on public health."

After four years of opposing such a bill--a similar measure was passed by the state Legislature last year but vetoed by Schwarzenegger--a group of chemical companies and associations led by the American Chemistry Council recently rescinded their opposition after it became apparent that the governor would sign it.

"Biomonitoring offers definitive proof of human exposure to chemicals that don't belong in our bodies," said Davis Baltz, senior program associate at Commonwealth. "This bill will be a national model for other states because it gives California public health officials the flexibility to test for chemicals that may be of special concern to our state, and from an ethical point of view, the program will enable study participants to learn their personal results if they choose."

According to the National Cancer Institute, an estimated 100,000 synthetic chemicals are currently in use in the United States, in everyday products such as cosmetics and other personal care products, pesticides, food dyes, cleaning supplies, fuels and plastics, and 2,000 new chemicals are added every year. Yet less than 10 percent of those chemicals have been tested for their effects on human health, Baltz said.

Biomonitoring studies have scientifically demonstrated that human exposure to many chemicals is widespread. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has documented the presence of 148 environmental chemicals in the bodies of Americans of all ages and races, according to the bill. However, the CDC national studies don't shed light on state exposure patterns.

"I'm astounded by the number of people I know personally who are fighting cancer and other serious diseases," Perata said. "Biomonitoring will generate valuable scientific information we don't currently have that will protect Californians' health and their environment."

"This law will help California create a strong, science-based program to establish links to chronic conditions, reduce exposure to toxic chemicals and better protect our health and our environment," said Ortiz, who is chair of the Senate Health Committee.

The CDC has offered a minimum of \$1.7 million dollars in in-kind analysis and training to California to support the launch a statewide biomonitoring program.

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