EPA Bans Two Common Chemicals That Cause Cancer

Found in household cleaning products and used in dry-cleaning, trichloroethylene and perchloroethylene are linked to several cancers.

December 11, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) this week banned two cancer-causing chemicals used in various industries and found in many household products, marking a major milestone for chemical safety, according to an EPA news release.

The EPA banned all uses of trichloroethylene (TCE) and perchloroethylene (PCE).

TCE is an extremely toxic chemical commonly used in cleaning and furniture care products, degreasers, lubricants, paints and arts and crafts spray coatings. TCE is known to cause non-Hodgkin lymphoma and liver and kidney cancer as well as damage to the central nervous system, immune system and reproductive organs.

Since the 1920s, TCE has been one of the most used solvents in numerous industries, according to CNN. Indeed, between 4.5% and 18% of the U.S. drinking water sources that tested annually contain TCE.

PCE is a human-made volatile liquid solvent used in dry cleaning, manufacturing and automobile repair. PCE is known to cause liver, kidney, brain and testicular cancer and can damage the immune, nervous and reproductive systems.

TCE will be prohibited within one year, while PCE will be phased out over 10 years, according to the EPA. Under the Toxic Substances Control Act, worker protections will be required for any remaining uses of PCE.

“It’s simply unacceptable to continue to allow cancer-causing chemicals to be used for things like

glue, dry cleaning or stain removers when safer alternatives exist," said Michal Freedhoff, assistant administrator for the EPA's Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention. "These rules are grounded in the best available science that demonstrates the harmful impacts of PCE and TCE. EPA continues to deliver on actions that protect people, including workers and children, under the nation's premier bipartisan chemical safety law."

The ban aligns with the Cancer Moonshot, a series of federal health initiatives President Joe Biden launched in 2016 and that the Biden-Harris administration reignited in 2022 with new actions and commitments. The Moonshot aims to reduce the cancer death rate in the United States by at least half by 2047, prevent more than 4 million cancer deaths and improve the experiences of those touched by cancer.

To read more articles in Cancer Health related to bans, click #Chemicals. There, you'll find headlines such as "How the Election Could Affect Toxic Chemical Regulation," "FDA Ban on Formaldehyde in Hair Products Delayed…Again" and "Administration Proposes Ban on Toxic Chemical Trichloroethylene."

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