



## WASHTENAW COUNTY RIGHT-TO-KNOW COALITION

*Working For Your Right To Know About Toxic Chemicals  
In The Community*

417 Detroit Street - Ann Arbor, MI. 48103 - (313) 761-3186

### THE PROBLEM

Washtenaw County residents, like residents of any populated area, are unknowingly exposed to toxic and hazardous chemicals every day. Presently, companies are not required to disclose the identity or the potential hazards associated with chemicals that we live and work with. Chemicals that pose hazards in the workplace often pose further hazards in the surrounding community when they are released into the air or water, or improperly disposed of on land. This is very dangerous, considering that:

*In December of 1984, thousands of people in Bhopal, India were exposed to toxic gas from leaking equipment at the nearby Union Carbide plant. "Truth is, Bhopal could happen in this country, too. We've already had our Love Canals, and, in Michigan, our Berlin-Ferro dumpsites. There are more than 60,000 chemicals produced and stored in America; government regulators and citizen groups can't tell where ticking time bombs are—or guarantee they won't go off."*

—Ann Arbor News  
Editorial

- 2,679 cases of occupational illness in Michigan were caused by exposure to toxic chemicals in 1981.
- Washtenaw County has one or two chemical emergencies each year. In 1984, for example, a chromic acid spill required emergency action.
- In a Washtenaw County accident at the GM Hydra-matic Plant, involving methyl chloroform, one worker was killed, and others required medical treatment from the misuse and handling of an unlabeled solvent.
- There are no existing regulations that require companies to disclose some of the most critical information on the use, storage, and health effects of toxic and hazardous chemicals.

**BASIC INFORMATION ON TOXIC AND HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS IS ESSENTIAL IN ORDER FOR FIREFIGHTERS, HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, ELECTED OFFICIALS, WORKERS, AND COMMUNITY RESIDENTS TO TAKE PREVENTATIVE ACTION TO PROTECT THE HEALTH OF WASHTENAW COUNTY CITIZENS.**

### THE SOLUTION

The Washtenaw County Right to Know Coalition demands that citizens and public officials have the Right to Know what chemicals are used and/or produced in the areas they live and work in. The Coalition therefore supports a strong community Right to Know regulation for Washtenaw County. This regulation will ensure that:

- Businesses put on file with the County Health Department the names of certain hazardous substances which they store, transport, manufacture, or emit.
- Right to Know information will be easily available to all community members concerned about toxic substances in Washtenaw County.
- The Right to Know information will include facts about the health risks, symptoms of and treatment for overexposure, safety precautions, and special fire instructions for each chemical on file.

### YOU CAN HELP!

Washtenaw County Commissioners need to know your opinion on this important matter. Call or write them, and let them know that you support a strong Community Right to Know regulation (see phone numbers and addresses on back).

### SUPPORTERS

- PIRGIM ● Ecology Center of Ann Arbor ● Huron Valley Labor Council ● UAW Region 1-A
- UAW Region 1-E ● AFSCME Region 4 P.E.O.P.L.E. Committee ● Ann Arbor Firefighters Association
- Michigan Right-to-Know Task Force



## WASHTENAW COUNTY RIGHT TO KNOW—FACT SHEET

### **Aren't there already State and Federal laws that give us the Right to Know?**

No, the Federal standard dealing with disclosure of information on toxics to workers has been found to be unacceptable to almost every scientific, public health or state government agency that has analyzed the issue, including some representatives from the chemical industry itself. In fact, even a Federal Appeals Court recently ruled that the OSHA standard was grossly inadequate. Specifically, the OSHA standard is deficient in the following ways:

- Companies have virtually free reign to choose which of the chemicals they use will be designated as "Trade Secrets," therefore allowing them to withhold the specific chemical identities from workers.
- There are no provisions which allow public officials and community members access to hazardous chemical information.
- Chemical names are not required to appear on containers of toxic substances.
- Enforcement of the Federal standard will be almost non-existent—the Detroit OSHA office responsible for enforcing such laws has employed only one enforcement officer to cover the entire state of Michigan.

### **Won't Washtenaw County Right to Know be costly for businesses?**

No, a strong Right to Know regulation would be beneficial to businesses within Washtenaw County:

- By reducing occupational illness, the Washtenaw County Right to Know regulation would decrease the loss in productivity associated with occupational illness and accidents.
- Workers compensation and insurance costs for companies would be reduced. Employers would reduce the risk of expensive cleanup operations and lawsuits related to environmental contamination and occupational exposure.
- An improved information flow increases the potential for streamlining of production processes and for reduction of redundant and unnecessary inventories. One example of this is a factory which, while labelling its chemicals, found 2,000 redundant substances.
- A strong Right to Know would increase the potential for business cooperation and coordination between chemical suppliers and smaller manufacturers, saving valuable time and resources currently wasted on tracking down the information that would be automatically required by Right to Know regulation.

### **Why Washtenaw County?**

- Washtenaw County is not alone in its effort to establish a strong Right to Know law. It would join more than a dozen states and over 50 local communities that have passed similar legislation, including Macomb County north of Detroit.
- Local communities are passing Right to Know laws in growing number, largely due to the continuing inaction on federal and state levels. Hopefully, passage of a Washtenaw County Right to Know regulation would send the message to the state legislature (and the Federal Congress) that we should pass legislation to protect all of Michigan's citizens from unnecessary toxic exposures.
- A county-wide Right to Know regulation makes good sense. Although Washtenaw County would benefit from supportive state and federal legislation, it is on the local level that such laws needs implementing the most. County health departments, emergency services, as well as local fire and police departments, are the agencies that deal most directly with the effects of toxic and hazardous chemicals in the community.

### **What Can I Do?**

**Call or write** your County Commissioners and let them know that you support a strong Washtenaw County Right to Know regulation.

#### District

1—Ellis Pratt, 11663 Pleasant Lake Rd., Manchester, MI, 48158, 428-8562; 2—Martin Straub, 13131 Island Lake Rd., Chelsea, MI, 48118, 475-9078; 3—Roy Smith, 7768 Munger Rd., Ypsilanti, MI, 48197, 483-2672; 4—Dillard Roy Craiger, 1151 Wendell Ave., Ypsilanti, MI, 48197, 483-2672; 5—Mary Egnor, 702 Collegewood, Ypsilanti, MI, 48197, 483-5003; 6—Meri Lou Murray, 2871 Sorrento, Ann Arbor, MI, 48104, 971-6828; 7—Raymond G. Shultz, 459 Brookside Dr., Ann Arbor, MI, 48105, 769-0400; 8—Donald Duquette, 1510 Lindwood, Ann Arbor, MI, 48103; 663-0731; 9—Catherine McClary, 1125 Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, 48104, 761-2061

**YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW!**