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Opinion

## FORUM: State can retain leadership in regulation of toxic goods

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Dr. Mark A. Mitchell

The General Assembly has a tremendous opportunity to continue being a national leader in protecting children against toxic chemicals, in promoting regulatory certainty for businesses and in assisting state businesses to compete in global markets that restrict toxic chemicals more than in the U.S.

Many chemicals found in our homes, consumer products and environment include carcinogens, neurotoxins and endocrine disrupters.

Some of these — such as the wallboard with formaldehyde used in Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers used after Hurricane Katrina — are produced in China, but banned for sale there and in other countries. But, it is perfectly legal to sell to them to unsuspecting U.S. consumers.

As a public health physician, I am very aware of the growing body of scientific evidence linking exposure to toxic chemicals with rising incidence of many serious diseases. There is growing consensus that cumulative exposure to these chemicals, particularly during critical windows of fetal development, are contributing to the rising incidence of childhood leukemia and brain cancers; adult cancers of the breast, prostate, kidney and liver; learning and behavioral disorders, including autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; obesity; insulin resistance and diabetes.

The American Chemistry Council and the Toy Industry Association argue that any attempts to regulate chemicals should happen at the federal level, and point to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's new chemical action plans as proof progress is being made.

Unfortunately, the EPA has indicated it will try to assess the amount of regulation required for just 83 of the 84,000 chemicals registered with the agency as potentially used in consumer products.

These assessments can take decades under current law, as evidenced by the agency's 10-year failed efforts to regulate asbestos and its recently completed 25-year effort to partially assess dioxins. The federal system of health protections from chemicals clearly does not work. Based on what I see when working at the national level, there is no reason to believe that it will be fixed anytime soon.

With federal efforts stalled, Connecticut must take leadership in protecting children. Senate Bill 274 establishes a Green Ribbon Science Panel to advise the state commissioner of public health and the commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection in establishing and reviewing a list of chemicals of high concern in relation to children and providing recommendations to reduce exposure to them. This framework ensures that decisions are science-based, and could have a significant public health impact.

The legislation also creates a framework to promote green chemistry and job innovation in the state by complementing the mission of the legislatively created Chemical Innovations Institute. Establishment of a list of chemicals of high concern is the first step in driving the market to develop and use safer alternatives. In addition, it can help kick-start needed comprehensive chemical reform on the federal level.

This bill promotes public health, continues Connecticut's national leadership and fosters green business innovation. Our lawmakers would do right by passing this legislation.

*Dr. Mark A. Mitchell, former director of Hartford's Health Department, is the founder and senior policy adviser for the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice. Write to him at P.O. Box 1421, Hartford 06143; email: **[mmitchell@enviro-md.com](mailto:mmitchell@enviro-md.com)**.*

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