

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Using Community-Based Social Marketing Strategies to Better Understand and Overcome Obstacles to EPP in Vermont

Prepared by Doug Kievit/Kylar
Pollution Prevention Planner, VT DEC

1

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

A host of EP items on state contract have benefited state government, Vermont municipalities, and schools – but the contract is restricted to these entities and its benefits cannot be extended to the average Vermont consumer.

2

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

1991 - The Vermont Household Hazardous Product Shelf Labeling Program...

- ⚡ required retailers stocking household products containing hazardous constituents to identify those products via a shelf label.
 - to promote TUR and P2 by educating consumers about the dangers of hazardous household products and encouraging them to consider alternatives.

3

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

During the more than a decade the Department tried to implement the shelf labeling program there was only limited compliance by the approximately 3,500 Vermont stores (e.g., grocery, hardware, house and garden, and convenience stores) subject to the law. Because of this and because of mounting retailer opposition, the law was repealed in 2002.

4

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

After Failing To Change Behavior...Then What?

Depending on the definition used, there are between 30,000 and 100,000 chemicals on the market in some shape or form in greater than laboratory scale quantities – with several hundred new substances being added every year. Of these, less than 5% fall into categories that are approved for specific uses such as food additives, pesticides, biocides or pharmaceuticals. The rest can be used unless specifically regulated against.

5

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

- ⚡ Formed a Consumer Toxics Use Reduction Committee with Public and Private Representatives
- ⚡ Committee Selected Broad Categories of Consumer Products to Focus on:
 - house and garden pesticides,
 - household cleaning chemical supplies, and
 - health and beauty aids.

6

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Substances Most Frequently Involved in Human Exposures		
Substance	Number	Percent
Analgesics	256,343	10.4
Cleaning substances	225,578	9.3
Cosmetics and personal care products	219,877	9.2
Foreign bodies	119,323	5.0
Sedatives/hypnotics/antipsychotics	111,001	4.7
Topicals	105,215	4.4
Cough and cold preparations	100,612	4.2
Anti-depressants	99,800	4.2
Bites and envenomations	96,585	4.1
Pesticides	96,112	4.0

NOTE: The Table above is a composite reprinted from the American Journal of Emergency Medicine summarizing the 2002 Annual Report of the American Association of Poison Control Centers, Toxic Exposure Surveillance System.

7

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Substances Most Frequently Involved in Pediatric Exposures (Children Under 6 Years of Age)		
Substance	Number	Percent
Cosmetics and personal care products	162,940	13.3
Cleaning substances	126,830	10.5
Analgesics	90,295	7.4
Foreign bodies	87,480	7.1
Topicals	85,170	7.0
Plants	62,100	5.1
Cough and cold preparations	62,065	5.1
Pesticides	50,415	4.1
Vitamins	46,239	3.7
Gastrointestinal preparations	38,815	3.2

NOTE: The Table above is a composite reprinted from the American Journal of Emergency Medicine summarizing the 2002 Annual Report of the American Association of Poison Control Centers, Toxic Exposure Surveillance System.

8

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Next Step: Identify Obstacles to Changed Behavior (Vermont Retailers)

- ✦ Paper survey that sought "to better understand to what extent environmentally preferable products were already available, and if they were not, to discover what the obstacles and barriers might be to such environmentally preferable purchasing."

9

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Next Step: Identify Obstacles to Changed Behavior (Consumers)

- ✦ *Telephone survey "...to determine how best to better understand consumer preferences and obstacles to purchasing Environmentally Preferable Products (EPPs) and to test popular assumptions about what drives decision-making in the marketplace."*

10

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Key Findings From the Retailers Survey:

- ✦ A clear majority of survey respondents do not stock EPPs and only 30% of survey respondents are asked by customers to have such products on the shelves.
- ✦ 60% of survey respondents expressed interest in carrying EPPs.

11

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Key Findings From the Retailers Survey:

- ✦ Obstacles to stocking EPPs are...
 - Lack of consumer demand (66%)
 - Higher costs of some alternatives (66%)
 - Products not available through distributor (54%)
- ✦ A majority (77%) of survey respondents said that if information and assistance were made available on safer or less toxic products, they would consider carrying such products.

12

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Key Findings From the Consumer Survey:

- ≈ Many surveyed Vermonters believe that non-toxic or least toxic alternatives are already widely available.
 - 72% (cleaning products)
 - 67% (health & beauty aids)
 - 50% (house & garden pesticides)

13

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Key Findings From the Consumer Survey:

- ≈ 82% of surveyed Vermonters either seeks out product information on toxicity (33%) or at least pays attention if it catches their eye (49%).

14

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Key Findings From the Consumer Survey:

- ≈ Survey respondents (when selecting from a list) identified the following as most important when deciding which products to purchase:
 - Product efficacy and quality
 - Ready availability
 - Identification as EP
 - Ease of use

15

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Key Findings From the Consumer Survey:

- ≈ Survey respondents when asked as an open-ended question what was most important when selecting products said they were most swayed by:
 - Product quality
 - Price
 - Trusted brand name

16

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Key Findings From the Consumer Survey:

- ≈ Only 3% of survey respondents said they were unwilling to spend extra for a least toxic alternative
- ≈ The mean value that survey respondents were willing to pay for EP alternates was \$0.62 on a dollar.

17

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Key Findings From the Consumer Survey:

- ≈ When asked what factors, when addressed to their satisfaction, would most likely predispose them to purchase EP products survey respondents gave priority to:
 - Product effectiveness (20%)
 - Cost (17%)
 - Ready availability (15%)

18

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Implications of the Findings:

- ⚡ Despite the professed willingness of Vermont retailers to carry EP products, less than a third are being asked by consumers to do so.
- ⚡ The expressed importance of product quality and efficacy require helping consumers make a clean break from any unfavorable experiences with first-generation "green" products.

19

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Implications of the Findings:

- ⚡ Although 82% of Vermonter say they read labels to avoid toxic constituents, in many cases the multi-purpose cleaner they say they used included hazardous ingredients (as listed in the product's MSDS). Clearly, product labels either don't tell the "whole" story or the toxicological implications are unclear to consumers.

20

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Implications of the Findings:

- ⚡ Vermont vendors cited lack of consumer demand and the higher costs of EP products as primary obstacles to stocking such products. Consumers expressed a willingness to pay up to 62 cents on a dollar for a least toxic alternative. Any effort to influence the market for EP products must create consumer demand and address issues of product efficacy and availability, as well as cost!

21

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

- ⚡ With a better understanding now of the obstacles to EPP in Vermont, members of the Consumer Toxics Use Reduction Committee will fashion a small grants program for Regional Solid Waste Districts and others to use the survey findings to develop initiatives designed to test various incentives and approaches to overcoming identified obstacles to the purchase of EPPs.

22

Consumer Chemicals in the Marketplace

Contact Information

Doug Kievit-Kylar
Vermont DEC
(802) 241-3628
doug.kievit-kylar@anr.state.vt.us

23