

EARTH TALK™

**Questions & Answers
About Our Environment**

Dear EarthTalk: How can we keep our kids safe from environmental hazards all around us in our everyday lives?

— Jennifer Nichols, Wareham, MA

Children are affected by the same environmental hazards as adults, only they're more vulnerable given their smaller size and the fact that their bodies are still developing. According to the World Health Organization, harmful exposures can start as early as in utero.

"Proportionate to their size, children ingest more food, drink more water and breathe more air than adults," reports the organization.

"Additionally, certain modes of behavior, such as putting hands and objects into the mouth and playing outdoors can increase children's exposure to environmental contaminants."

Some of the most common contaminants we should be vigilant about avoiding include pesticides (in foods), lead (in old paint), asbestos (in insulation and construction ma-

terials), BPA (in plastic food/drink containers and the lining of cans), PFCs (in non-stick cookware, carpeting and mattresses) and flame retardants (in furniture and drapery).

And, of course, many branded household cleaners contain potentially hazardous ingredients (bleach, ammonia, diethanolamine, triethanolamine) as well.

Given how common these elements are in today's world, keeping kids safe isn't easy. For starters, choose organic food and drink whenever possible to cut down on the pesticides your kids ingest.

While pesticides work well to keep away the bugs that can ruin harvests, they also can cause neurological and reproductive problems for humans who ingest traces of them.

Apples, celery, strawberries, peaches, spinach, nectarines, grapes, bell peppers, potatoes, blueberries, lettuce and kale/collard greens are the worst offenders in the produce aisle, according to the Environmental Working Group, so definitely spring for organic versions of these particular fruits and veggies.

Packaged and processed foods likely contain plenty of pesticide residues, too, unless they are marked as certified organic.

To avoid household cleaners, the Organic Consumers Association recommends ditching the expensive specialized products that likely contain harmful chemical additives.

"A few safe, simple ingredients like soap, water, baking soda, vin-



Children are affected by the same environmental hazards as adults, only they're more vulnerable given their smaller size and the fact that their bodies are still developing. (Photo by Roddy Scheer)

egar, lemon juice and borax, aided by a little elbow grease and a coarse sponge for scrubbing, can take care of most household cleaning needs."

Look for specific formulations on organicconsumers.org, as well as links to some environmentally friendly name-brand household cleaners.

While there is less we can do individually about air pollution if we want our kids to spend time outdoors, at the macro level we can all help by driving our cars less and turning down our thermostats (to reduce the emissions we cause) and ordering less stuff online (to cut down on air pollution from shipping).

Parents, teachers and caregivers should educate themselves about what to avoid and become expert label readers so they can make health-smart choices.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention is urging pediatricians to take a greater interest in the environmental impacts on the health of their patients and discuss with parents how to keep kids safe in and around the home, the neighborhood, and at school.

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SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR PLAN

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Recommendations also include supporting community and housing organizations to work together to champion and implement the housing strategy. The city will also prioritize early opportunities to identify housing sites.

After the formal presentation, this reporter asked Cupid Alexander, a senior policy advisor on housing initiatives for Mayor Wheeler, about the mayor's thoughts on preventing gentrification in Southwest Portland.

"We're coming up with strategies for older residents with assistance in home repairs and grants to make improvements and being intentional on the front end," Alexander said.

Small groups of participants met to discuss solutions for the city to consider. Some of the ideas included trainings for future city planning managers, avoiding displacement, and increasing communication between the cities of Portland and Tigard.

Another idea described using undesirable locations of a property, such as at the end of a freeway off ramp or where vehicles may idle for long periods of time, to be used for utilities, parking, or stormwater treatment.

Other solutions listed providing tax credits for developers who provide more affordable housing units and having employers play a more dominant role.

"We need more representation of low-income renters at the table where decisions and policies are made," said one participant. "They need to sit on committees."

"Developers should meet quotas for affordable housing before building out the rest of their properties."

Nura Elmagbari, of the Portland Refugee Support Group, spoke about the plight of recently arrived immigrants who come to the U.S. for asylum.

"Many of these individuals have post traumatic stress disorders, depression, and mental or physical health issues," she said. "Many can't work and some don't understand the process of sustaining their benefits once they expire or run out."

According to Elmagbari, "Our program helps them navigate the system. They want to become independent and not rely on government support."

In February 2016, the Inclusionary Housing Zoning Code Project was adopted by the Portland City Council.

It was a collaborative effort between the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability and the Portland Housing Bureau to meet the need for affordable housing in the city.

This code requires that all development projects with 20 or more dwelling units in one building participate in the inclusionary housing program.

It sets the percentage or share of units in a development that must be affordable at different income levels to meet the terms of the program.

A meeting summary will be sent to all in attendance. The city encouraged all to remain involved.

The next Southwest Corridor Community Advisory Committee meeting will be held on Nov. 6 from 6:15 to 8:45 p.m. at the Multnomah Arts Center, room 30, 7688 SW Capitol Highway.



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