

BEWARE OF PLASTIC SHOES

"Reproductive disorders, decreased fertility, impaired fertility, harm to the unborn, etc.

Group warns vs toxic chemicals in plastic shoes

Plastic shoes such as flip-flops, sandals and clogs from a number of countries, including the Philippines may have high levels of environmental toxins, an environmental group warned. Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) such plastic shoes have "disturbing concentrations of harmful chemicals that are injurious to human health and the environment."

"We have found frightening concentrations of environmental toxins in the shoes that can spread to people and to the environment as the shoes become worn. The investigation also shows that companies have no control and that legislation is too weak," said Mikael Karlsson, president of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC).

SSNC is a 100-year-old environmental organization that conducted a study on toxins in such shoes. The study was made in cooperation with the EcoWaste Coalition and partner groups in India, Indonesia, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. It showed the tested plastic shoe samples contained varying amounts of harmful chemicals regardless of the country of purchase, price, model or color. According to the report "Chemicals Up-Close," 17 of the 27 pairs of plastic shoes tested positive for phthalates used as softening agents in polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic.

EcoWaste said phthalates such as butylbenzyl phthalate or BBP, dibutyl phthalate or DBP, di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate or DEHP, diisodecyl phthalate or DiDP, diisononyl phthalate or DiNP, and di-n-octyl phthalate or DnOP are endocrine disruptors associated with developmental and reproductive disorders, including incomplete testicular growth and decreased fertility in men.

"DEHP, in particular, is officially classified as being able to cause impaired fertility and harm to the unborn child," it said. "Three of the four samples from the Philippines were found to contain DEHP, with one sample containing DEHP and DiDP, and another sample containing DEHP and DBP phthalate," it added. One locally-manufactured slipper for children that the EcoWaste Coalition bought in SM North EDSA Department Store contained 6.9% of DEHP and 4.7% of DiDP. A China-made flip-flop purchased in Puregold Supermarket in Cubao had 8.6% DEHP.

A men's slipper bought in SM North EDSA Department Store registered the highest amount of DBP at 9.6% among the plastic shoe samples from seven countries.

"There is no justification for the continued use of harmful chemicals such as phthalates in consumer products that could pose grave health and environmental risks. The toxins are spread as the products are used and can leached out when disposed in water bodies, dumpsites and landfills," said EcoWaste president Manny Calonzo. "We hope that the results of the investigation would prompt our lawmakers and regulators to craft and enforce legislation that will tighten, if not completely end, the use of toxic chemicals that are dangerous to public health and the environment," he added.

The shoes were also tested for a number of tin organic compounds and for heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium, cobalt, chromium, copper, lead, mercury, manganese, nickel and zinc.

All the samples from the Philippines and elsewhere tested positive for varying concentrations of one or more of the 10 heavy metals analyzed, many of which are harmful to the endocrine, nervous and reproductive systems, are carcinogenic and allergenic, and highly toxic to aquatic organisms. The highest level of copper content was found in one shoe sample from the Philippines, while another sample (also from the Philippines) tested high for nickel content. Investigation also showed that local and global regulations on harmful chemicals are "far too weak" and that urgent and concerted policies are required to safeguard consumers and the environment from toxic harm.

EcoWaste recommended that consumers:

- * Assert the right to know: demand complete product information from the manufacturer and retailer.
- * Avoid PVC products and go for safer substitutes that do not contain phthalate plasticizers or softeners.
- * Refrain from patronizing products made of toxic substances or if the manufacturer cannot provide essential data to make informed choices.

It recommended that manufacturers:

- * Apply the substitution principle: produce quality products sans harmful chemical ingredients, especially when safer alternatives are available.
- * Ensure that chemicals used in production do not adversely impact human health and the environment following the precautionary principle.
- * Inform consumers about chemicals used in shoe production, and which of these are present in the finished shoes.
- * Provide complete product information, including pictorial hazard warnings on products containing hazardous substances.

It recommended that politicians and government:

- * Review the Priority Chemicals List of the Philippines and disclose measures undertaken to protect the public health and the environment from these chemicals.

- * Issue Chemical Control Orders (CCOs) on harmful substances of priority concern.

- * Reject market access to manufacturers that fail to provide data relevant to chemical contents of their products and their potential health and environmental impacts.

- * Support legally-binding global initiatives for the phase-out of harmful chemicals such as mercury and lead.

- * Increase budgetary resources for the effective enforcement of chemical safety regulations, including the national implementation of SAICM.

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