



Canadian
Environmental Law
Association
EQUITY. JUSTICE. HEALTH.



Citizens' Network on
Waste Management



MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: 29 January, 2020

Attn: Environment, Health, & News Editors

Canada is urged to stop the recycling of products with globally banned toxic flame retardants: Groups seek greater protection to the environment and health

Ottawa, Canada – Only a small group of countries continues taking advantage of a loophole in the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) that allow banned chemicals like toxic flame-retardants (polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) in recycling. Canada is one of them. These toxic polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) flame retardant chemicals were banned globally many years ago. However, this class of chemicals continue to contaminate consumer goods made from recycled plastics because a group of countries requested an exemption to continue recycling of products containing these chemicals and the use and final disposal of articles manufactured from recycled materials.

The small group of countries initially included the European Union (EU), Brazil, Cambodia, Turkey, South Korea, Japan and Canada, however the [recent decision](#) made by the EU will no longer allow materials containing these globally banned flame retardants to be recycled. Canada nevertheless is among [the remaining 6 countries](#) maintaining recycling exemptions for products containing PBDEs. The exemption has permitted recycle materials such as plastics from discarded computers and other products containing PBDEs in the recycling stream for the past ten years. Under this exemption, this practice will continue until 2030. Environmental health organizations are urging the Canadian government to end the practice and withdraw the recycling exemptions because the resulting contamination of the recycling stream allows banned chemicals in products and poses a threat to public health, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged groups including children.

Recent analyses of consumer products sold in Canada made from recycled plastics, which originated largely from discarded electronics equipment, has revealed toxic flame-retardant contamination in sampled hair accessories, children's toys, and other plastic products. These chemicals are known to disrupt human hormone systems, adversely impacting the development of the nervous system and children's intelligence. They are released from products into household dust, causing exposure.

In 2017 and 2019 Health and Environment Justice Support (HEJSupport) and the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), in collaboration with the global environmental health network IPEN, conducted product sampling in Canada to assess the presence of PBDEs in products made of recycled plastics. Pocket calculators, hair racks, combs, toy cars and puzzle cubes on sale in Canada contained toxic flame banned under the Stockholm Convention. Those products are not a fire hazard and are not expected to contain the some of the most toxic substances targeted for global elimination. These findings echo the results of a [2018 analysis](#) of products sampled in 19 European countries in which a quarter of the products tested were contaminated with PBDEs and other brominated flame retardants as a result of recycling practices.

Canada was the first country to sign and ratify the Convention in recognition of the impacts of POPs to the Canadian environment including the arctic communities and ecosystem.

“We believe the recycling is important to minimize waste and virgin resource consumption and this is a significant step towards a circular economy. However, close attention should be paid on what we recycle to avoid further contamination of new products with toxic chemicals. The solution is not to stop recycling, but to remove the hazardous chemicals from the original products and to prevent contaminated products from entering the recycling streams,” said Olga Speranskaya, HEJSupport Co-Director and IPEN Senior Advisor. “We hope that Canada will announce its withdrawal of the recycling exemptions for PBDEs at UN Stockholm Convention meeting in Geneva in 2021 if not before.”

“We are facing a troubling situation where the global elimination goal for toxic chemicals set in the Convention are being undermined by exemptions allowing for recycling of plastics containing toxic PBDEs,” said Fe de Leon, researcher and paralegal for CELA. “By withdrawing from the recycling exemption in the Convention, Canada will send a clear message for the need to achieve global elimination of PBDEs and to product manufacturers that innovation and product design can lead to elimination of toxic chemicals and ensure safe recycling.”

“Business has to change their wasteful practices and eliminate the worst chemicals in materials that simply can’t be safely and reliably recycled to avoid their appearance in new products”, adds Emily Alfred, Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) Waste Campaigner. “It is unbelievable that recycled products may still contain chemicals that governments around the world have banned because they agreed they are damaging to human health and the environment.”

“There are a number of known technical solutions for identifying plastics containing brominated flame retardants and keeping these plastics out of recycling”, notes John Jackson, Coordinator for Citizens’ Network on Waste Management Coordinator. “If implemented, these solutions will pave the way towards a safe circular economy that will benefit all Canadians.”

Reporters and editors can view letter from HEJSupport and CELA to Canadian government/Focal points of the Stockholm Convention at <https://ipen.org/documents/PBDE-exemptions>.

-30-

To arrange a media interview or for more information, contact:

Olga Speranskaya, HEJSupport Co-Director, Tel.: +1-613-252-9839 (email: olga.speranskaya@hej-support.org)
Fe de Leon, Researcher and Paralegal, CELA, Tel.: +1-416-960-2284 ext 7223(email: deleonf@cela.ca)
Emily Alfred, Campaigner, TEA, Tel.: +1-416-543-1542 (mobile) (email: emily@torontoenvironment.org)
John Jackson, Coordinator, CNWM, Tel.: +1-519-744-7503 (email: jackson@web.ca)

Health and Environment Justice Support (HEJSupport) is a membership based organization, working to achieve a healthy environment and environmental justice for affected people. It provides long term technical, policy and awareness raising support for harmed communities to enable them to make their problems heard and to strive for solutions. HEJSupport hosts Chemicals in Products and EDCs Groups for IPEN.

Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) is an environmental legal clinic based in Toronto, Ontario that works to protect health and our environment by seeking justice for those harmed by pollution and by working to change laws and policies to prevent such problems in the first place. For almost 50 years. CELA has used legal tools, undertaken groundbreaking research and advocated for increased environmental protection and to safeguard communities, with a specific mandate to provide assistance to low income people and disadvantaged communities.

Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) has been advocating for a greener city for all since 1988. TEA has a long history of success working with communities, businesses and labour groups to create better environmental laws in Toronto and Ontario.

IPEN is a global network of more than 500 health and environmental public interest organizations in over 100 countries, working to eliminate the world's most harmful chemicals to create a toxics-free future.

The **Citizens' Network on Waste Management (CNWM)** is a network of citizens working on municipal waste, radioactive waste, and hazardous waste issues since 1981. The CNWM is dedicated to minimizing material and energy consumption, maximizing reuse of used materials, and eliminating waste disposal. It is also dedicated to eliminating toxic contamination of the environment by incinerator and landfill emissions, as well as by improper recycling and composting.