

Contaminated without consent

How much do you know about the links between hazardous chemicals and breast cancer?

**NO
MORE
BREAST
CANCER**
TACKLING AN ENVIRONMENTAL DISEASE

Breast Cancer UK and the No More Breast Cancer campaign have their roots in work begun in the 1990s by organisations such as the Women's Environmental Network, the 'free radicals' and the Ban Lindane Group. The present campaign launched in September 2005 with the publication of our document *Breast Cancer: an environmental disease*. The report highlights the links between hazardous chemicals and breast cancer and calls for primary prevention of the disease.

It's scientifically accepted that prolonged exposure to natural oestrogens in the body increases the risk of breast cancer but there are also many synthetic chemicals in the environment that can mimic the actions of oestrogen and disrupt normal hormonal activity.

In some cases these disruptions have been shown to increase the risk of breast cancer over time. These chemicals are commonly known as carcinogens and endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs). EDCs can be found in many pesticides, plastics, detergents, solvents, prescription drugs, food additives, cosmetics, and toiletries.

This issue was addressed by the NFWI during their campaign on the EU's REACH legislation, which ended in 2006. Scientific study since the 1950's has strengthened the argument that the toxic accumulation of EDCs



Caption.....

and hazardous chemicals in our bodies are a major disruption to our health.

The rise in breast cancer incidence since the end of the Second World War can only be partially explained by the risk factors such as poor diet, alcohol, late pregnancy and obesity. Research has shown that fewer than 50 per cent of breast cancer cases can be attributed to these factors. Inherited genes, such as BRCA1, account for less than 10 per cent of cases. This means that for an overwhelming majority of women the disease is not passed on through genes, but acquired during their lifetime.

Many experts argue, therefore, that breast cancer is made, not born, and could potentially be prevented by reducing exposure to hazardous chemicals. However, government advisors are recommending that provision be made for a greatly increased disease burden in future years, the implication being that the NHS should be able to control breast cancer with life-long use of chemoprevention

drugs. But the idea that women will find a future where breast cancer is seen as acceptable is not only disturbing but also economically unsustainable.

Already breast cancer is the foremost cancer in the EU, and the UK's most common cancer with over 44,000 women being diagnosed each year. In fact the number of women living with, being treated for, and dying of breast cancer at any one time in this country exceeds the present WI membership by more than 40,000.

The No More Breast Cancer campaign argues that hazardous chemicals in our environment are the major missing category in the officially recognised list of risks. We argue that any breast cancer public health strategy *must* include cancer risks arising from chronic, life-long, multiple, low-level exposures to hundreds of man-made chemical compounds known to adversely impact on human health.

Therefore, we're challenging the Government to acknowledge this major public health risk and to act by:

- accepting that no 'lifestyle' change can prevent a woman getting breast cancer while cancer causing agents and EDCs are allowed to build up in the environment and our bodies
- including hazardous chemicals as a recognised risk factor impacting breast cancer incidence levels, thus linking public health strategies more effectively to environmental policy making
- committing to a national primary prevention strategy for breast cancer

Sign up to receive information about our impending Government petition at www.nomorebreastcancer.org.uk

We'll also be exhibiting at the NFWI AGM in Liverpool on 4 June, so please come and visit our stand. Alternatively contact us on 0845 680 1322 or by post at: No More Breast Cancer campaign, Breast Cancer UK, B.M. Box 7767, London, WC1N 3XX.



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