

November 1, 2007

1553 Pine Street #2
San Francisco, CA 94109-4611

California Green Chemistry Initiative
Department of Toxic Substances Control
P.O. Box 806
Sacramento, CA 95812-0806



Re: The California Green Chemistry Initiative

Thank you for soliciting input from California residents concerning the Green Chemistry Initiative. I am currently writing a book-length narrative about environmental illness (including one fictional character based on Dr. John Balmes, who was extremely helpful to me when I first became chemically sensitive), and I would love to contribute my insights to your project.

The REACH program currently underway in the E.U. would be a wonderful model for California. In addition to this, however, we need to zero in on those toxins to which the general public is being heavily exposed on a daily basis. At the top of this list is secondhand cigarette smoke.

Twenty-one years ago, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop concluded that secondhand smoke causes disease. Twenty years later, Surgeon General Richard Carmona called secondhand smoke an alarming public health threat, "a serious health hazard at any level." One and a half years ago, the State of California's Air Resources Board defined secondhand smoke as "toxic." So what are we waiting for?

Who are we afraid of?

This is not a tobacco issue. This is not an issue of smokers' rights. This has nothing to do with raising the sales tax on cigarettes as a deterrent to those who have already (sadly) become addicted. This is a simple matter of nonsmokers having the right to remain chemical-free . . . whether walking down the street or enjoying the privacy of their own apartments. Before I am asked by the Governor to help line the deep pockets of the health insurance industry, I should be allowed to protect the integrity of my own body. Following the lead set by the city of Belmont, the State of California should immediately enact laws to protect nonsmokers EVERYWHERE, to put the burden of avoidance on smokers themselves.

We need to adopt a similar commonsense attitude toward the vats of hot tar allowed to idle curbside for hours while roofing companies make repairs, diesel generators that run for twelve hours at a time at construction sites, diesel buses and trucks idling at length outside hotels and office buildings.

I am also concerned that green chemistry puzzles solved on paper and in research labs are often not as carcinogen-free as product manufacturers and urban planners would like to believe. The flooring at San Francisco Camerawork, for example, ecologically correct in its source: recycled tires, is outgassing as heavily as the carpeting in the Staples store on Van Ness, which opened in 1999 and still smells. The interior of my sister's Prius — purchased eight months ago and touted as an environmentally correct automobile — is outgassing as toxically as any other new car's. An eco project called Scrap House, erected in the Civic Center area of San Francisco in 2005 and constructed solely from salvaged materials, was so full of contaminants that it gave me a headache within five minutes of entering. Many "natural" products simply are not.

I mention this critical problem because a panel of chemically sensitive volunteers, to be used as a resource for anecdotal information as well as specific product response, might provide an interesting component to your Green Chemistry Initiative. After all, folks with environmental illness are only symptomatic IN ADVANCE of everyone else: the immune system of almost anyone will respond in some form to flame retardants, for example; it's just that my immune system "alerts" me almost immediately.

In addition, the specific ways in which our cognitive abilities, patterns of sleep, and memory retrieval have been transformed by exposure to chemicals may provide insights that researchers in a variety of fields might find useful. For instance, I lost my ability to create mental images from the printed word and had to re-teach myself to read; because of this — and drawing on my past as an award-winning student of literature — I have acquired insights into what makes a page of text LD-friendly. I am fairly certain I understand the mechanism "deja vecu," an odd condition being studied by a team of British researchers. And who knows . . . my enhanced sense of smell — yet only for specific substances — might provide clues for researchers studying memory cells and the immune system.

Please consider my comments and feel free to contact me at the above San Francisco address, or at 415.771.2233. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Trudy Fisher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Trudy Fisher

cc: John Balmes