

**N**ews of the “toxic soup” contained in the floodwaters of New Orleans has been making headlines around the world, but this recipe is served up daily in practically every city throughout the United States. While the recipes differ from state to state, the “backbone” ingredients—pesticides, heavy metals, petroleum products and other industrial chemicals—are virtually everywhere.

Americans watched in horror and shame as our government—on every level—did not live up to our expectations, and as a result so many suffered in New Orleans and the surrounding Gulf Coast following hurricane Katrina. Yet this same travesty continues with the toxic assault on our environment that affects everyone within our borders.

So many have put their trust, along with the health and well-being of our country, in government agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Institute of Health (NIH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), but the proverbial levee won't hold here either. To date, the EPA has approved over 80,000 synthetic chemicals that continue to be released into the environment. We are told that these toxins are at “acceptable” levels, but common sense tells us otherwise.

Toxic chemicals are in our air, our water, and our fruits, vegetables, meats, fish and poultry. They're in everyday products like household cleaners, nail polish and remover, make-up, lotions, and cigarettes. And now they're showing up in newborn babies.

A study released this summer by the Environmental Work Group (EWG) tested umbilical cord blood of infants born in the U.S. and found an average of 200 industrial chemicals and pollutants. In total, tests identified 287 chemicals of which 180 cause cancer, 217 are toxic to the brain and nervous system, and 208 are linked to birth defects or abnormal development.

These findings refute the assertion by some that the placenta shields cord blood (and the fetus) from most chemicals and other toxins in the environment. But we don't need a researcher's study to tell us what

we already know—carrying around these toxins in our systems is not acceptable.

For those who need a little more convincing, consider this: a Washington State University study reported in the June 3rd issue of *Science* magazine indicates that exposure to environmental toxins impacts health far greater than anyone ever imagined. Researchers found that the effects are passed along to offspring for as many as four generations.

It's time for the national spotlight to shine on the actions we must take to reduce our exposures to these toxins in our homes, schools and businesses. First and foremost, ignore the chemical industry's assault on our lives. Don't buy into the current “better living through chemistry” mind set. We need to be conscious of our actions. The days are gone when we can spray chemicals without a thought of where these chemicals end up, because they end up in our air, our water, our soil, and in our children.

There are plenty of all-natural alternatives to keep any surface clean and germ free. The same is true for pesticides. Buying organic fruits, vegetables and meats may be a bit more costly, but what price do you put on the hormones, antibiotics, pesticides, and other chemicals in non-organic foods we consume?

We don't have to wait for Congressional confirmation to recognize that our children are facing problems like asthma, leukemia, autism spectrum disorders, ADD/ADHD, and diabetes in alarmingly high numbers. And the rates keep rising. There are safe, accessible and effective methods available to eliminate these toxins from the body. This information must be mainstreamed into our national health care system and national media.

It's time for America to take a long hard look at our actions— and inaction—over the past centuries. Some view our toxic environment as an unavoidable by-product of our industrialized world; others claim it is callous greed—the need for power and money at any cost. No matter where we ultimately choose to lay blame, we owe it to our children and to the planet they must inherit to do all we can to clean up our act. ■

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