
Demasculinization Generation

Some disturbing news on the environmental front may manifest in a future generation besieged by penis envy. Studies have discovered that phthalates—the chemical compounds used to make plastics soft and malleable—are causing baby boys to be born with underdeveloped penises and incomplete descent of the testicles. These pervasive plasticizers comprise a wide range of everyday goods, including cosmetics, toys and PVC medical devices. Aside from apparently reducing the size of young boys' manhood, phthalates make lipstick creamier and children's toys chew-proof.

Loopholes in Federal law currently allow manufacturers to forgo listing phthalates as an ingredient in cosmetics or a component in plastics—but change is on the horizon. Ever the trendsetter, California is the only state in the nation to address these concerns head on by introducing bills that would enforce stricter labeling standards on products containing the potentially harmful compounds and banning phthalates from toys for children age three and under.

Interestingly, the FDA has not banned the use of use of medical devices that contain phthalates, but it has recommended that hospitals limit their use. Kudos to Miller's Children's Hospital in Long Beach for being ahead of the curve—in 2002 they eliminated all IV and TPN (total parenteral nutrition) bags containing the hazardous substance and will eventually follow suit in all MemorialCare affiliates throughout the LA area.

Show California Legislature that you support the elimination of phthalates by contacting your congressperson. Find your local lawmakers at congress.org —JR

GET ACTIVE

With gas prices setting record highs, the peak oil debate rages on. Experts squabble over predicting exactly when our planetary oil reserves will run dry, but we all can agree that it's silly to wait until we're facing a crisis to change our bad habits. As late summer is inarguably the peak of driving season, it's also the perfect time to re-examine our fuel fixation. Decrease your petrol proclivity with the following tips:

- Wean yourself off your gas-guzzler. Walk, bike, carpool or take public transportation when you can.
- Increase your fuel economy by driving the speed limit, removing excess weight from your ride, and keeping your car properly tuned and tires inflated to the appropriate pressure.
- Green your home by planting shade trees, installing solar panels and investing in Energy Star appliances.

And to take an even more active stance, visit peakoilaction.org for local oil-conservation and sustainable energy meet-ups, film screenings and other community events.

WEBSIGHTINGS

- For those who think commerce and a green lifestyle are on opposing teams, Treehugger.com just might change your mind. The site is jam-packed with news, reviews and shopping ideas for the eco-conscious consumer with discriminating taste.
- Still steaming from the 2004 election? Know someone in Ohio who stood in line for hours at the polls, was intimidated or turned away because of "improper identification?" OpenVotingConsortium.org aims to establish standardized protocols that allow for public monitoring of elections. Check out their site for info on laws, rights and what's being done to police future elections.
- Many of us realize that traditional medicine isn't the only the way to treat what's ailing us. Too bad our government and health insurance companies don't see it the same way. Citizens.org battles the powers that be, protecting our right to choose alternative therapies and keep our food and water chemical-free. Sign up to stay in the loop.
—*Jessica Ridenour*