

# A big step towards stronger chemical policy

Jul 27, 2012 by Kristin Schafer



Three cheers for sanity on Capitol Hill!

For the first time in 36 years, [lawmakers voted](#) Wednesday to strengthen the national law governing toxic chemicals. If it keeps moving and becomes law, the bill will tighten the rules governing those 84,000+ substances that make their way into our homes in everything from baby bottles to seat cushions.

True, it was the first of many steps: a committee vote in the Senate. But it's a huge, important move in the right direction — made in the face of strong pushback from the chemical industry. And it's long overdue.

As both a mom and a policy person at PAN, I'm thrilled. Hats off especially to Senators Boxer and [Lautenberg](#) for their leadership in pressing the Safe Chemicals Act of 2012 forward.

### Industry accountability? Refreshing.

In the hearing leading up to Wednesday's vote, these Senators challenged the chemical industry to take responsibility for the harm their products cause — and for turning a blind eye to the science proving this harm. "Don't you owe people an apology?" [Senator Boxer](#) asked one chemical industry official.

How refreshing. And yes, they do.

The [proposed new law](#) — which will now move forward to a vote on the Senate floor — would shift the burden to chemical corporations to demonstrate the safety of their products. This common sense approach would replace the current system, which rushes products to market and leaves it up to EPA officials to prove they cause harm. Under the new law, this longstanding "innocent until proven guilty" paradigm for chemicals would no longer hold true.

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The bill also directs EPA to take immediate action to reduce exposure to chemicals that are [persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic](#), a category known as PBTs. Though pesticides are not covered under the Safe Chemicals Act — which focuses on industrial chemicals — we at PAN have long supported efforts toward chemical policy reform, and particularly this provision on PBTs.

Longlasting, toxic chemicals that build up in our bodies and can be passed from one generation to

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the next pose unique risks to both human health and the environment. The global [Stockholm Convention](#) on Persistent Organic Pollutants recognizes this, and it's high time U.S. policy did the same.

### **Groundswell of concern**

This week's vote reflects growing, widespread understanding and concern in communities across the country about how chemicals are affecting our health.

In the past few years, these concerns have been raised by nurses and other health professionals, businesses, environmental health and community groups and moms organizations. PAN is a longtime member of the national [Safer Chemicals Healthy Families](#) coalition that has been leading the charge.

From "[stroller brigades](#)" to [scientific reports](#) to congressional hearings, the noise made in recent years about toxic chemicals and health has finally moved Congress to act.

[Andy Igrejas](#), Director of the national coalition, hopes the bill will become the law of the land:

Today's vote is a victory for American families dealing with the many health problems, like childhood cancer, linked to unregulated chemicals. We hope Senate Republicans can find a way to join in this important work as this legislation moves to the Senate floor.

We hope so too.

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