

## Activity – Grab Bags or “Props”

### Guidance for Service Providers

#### Introduction:

With actual products/items in hand, (or as drawings or pictures), service providers or parents can discuss risks or benefits related to common items. This activity can be used in a small group, as a table-top demonstration or as “props” to illustrate points made in a classroom or lecture-style presentation.

The “props” or grab bag items provide entry points to conversations. Typically, questions and other topics will come up. The facilitator can help answer questions and provide supporting information from fact sheets, websites, etc. With a topic as broad as children’s environmental health, it is best to pick just a few items from areas the facilitator feels ready to address. The items in the grab bag generally make for fun conversations and participants often learn many of the take-away messages from each other.

#### Example #1: Plastics

**Overall messages: Reduce use of plastics, particularly for heating, serving and storing food and drinks. Don’t use plastic in the microwave. Become informed in order to make better choices among different types of plastics.**

In a table-top demonstration, provide examples of the seven different types of plastics labelled with the recycling symbols 1 through 7 (the numbers are enclosed in the triangular recycling symbol). Most people use these recycling symbols to identify plastic containers that are accepted by municipal recycling programs. Many communities allow for blue box recycling of #1 and #2 plastics. Some municipal recycling programs accept more types; in some cases all seven types. Some people may not have this recycling option and may not be familiar with looking for the recycling symbols at all. Apart from their use in plastic recycling programs, the symbols provide useful information. The CPCHE *Playing It Safe: Plastics* fact sheet provides more information. The fact sheet and other resources are available at [www.getdrasticwithplastic.ca](http://www.getdrasticwithplastic.ca).

The topic of plastics typically generates a lot of discussion. People will ask about plastic grocery bags and other food storage bags. Fortunately, these are most often #4 plastic – one of the better choices, although food should not be heated in any plastic nor should hot foods be put into plastic containers. Plastics can have important uses. Plastic sheeting can be used to control dust during renovations. A plastic bag can be used to shroud a vacuum cleaner while changing the bag, or to line a lidded container to collect dryer lint, therefore helping to avoid the spread of contaminants.

People often ask about plastic items that are not labelled with recycling symbols. For example, many children’s toys are made of plastic. While product safety law is supposed to prevent toys from containing toxic substances, it does not always do so. Product recalls of toys are too common. Other plastic products, especially electrical or battery-powered appliances, often contain flame retardant chemicals. Older products contain PBDEs – very toxic substances. PBDEs are gradually being phased out but they continue to contaminate house dust from older products. And, many other toxic substances continue to be used in plastics. Cadmium compounds, for example, may be used in plastic pigments.

#### Key take-away messages about plastics:

Aim for an overall reduction in the use of plastics. Since you can’t avoid plastics entirely, choose ways to reduce use.

- Consider glass, ceramic and metal for storing and serving food and beverages, whenever possible.

- Don't reuse soft plastic water bottles or other single-use plastic containers (typically labelled with the #1 and #2 recycling symbols).
- Don't microwave or heat foods in plastic. "Microwave-safe" only means the container won't melt, not that it won't leach chemicals. Use glass or ceramic instead (metal in the oven).
- Instead of using plastic film, cover foods with a bowl or plate to control splatter in the microwave or when storing food.
- Children should be discouraged from putting in their mouths any plastic items that are not meant as toys. Chemicals of concern include phthalates, Bisphenol A, PBDEs and dioxins, among others.
- Burning garbage, especially plastics, creates dangerous poisons.

## Example #2: Common household items and consumer products

**Overall message: Common items can create exposure risks. With awareness, exposure can be reduced or eliminated.**

Create a grab bag activity on environmental health issues, or add items to an existing grab bag activity focused on prenatal or child health by using items suggested in the table below. It is important to include both positive choices/alternatives alongside those that pose exposure risks. The table provides a brief explanation of each suggested item, as well as sources of additional information including handouts that you may wish to make available. If the purpose of each item is not raised in the discussion or is unclear, explain it directly or ask questions to prompt participants to figure it out.

Information on health risks and exposure reduction strategies for common household items, such as cleaning products and plastics, is provided in the 13-minute CPCHE video "Creating Healthy Home Environments for Kids: Top 5 Tips." Consider showing the video, or selected segment(s), prior to or after engaging participants in the hands-on grab bag activity. The video and supporting informational resources are available at [www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca](http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca).

Items for Grab Bag	Issues being raised	Relevant CPCHE materials
<p><b>PLASTICS</b>  <b>Main messages: Reduce use of plastics, particularly for heating, serving and storing food and drinks. Don't use plastic in the microwave. Become informed in order to make better choices among different types of plastics.</b></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of #1 through #7 plastic containers (disposable and reusable water bottles, plastic wrap, etc.)</li> <li>• Examples of non-plastic food storage or serving containers (glass, ceramic)</li> <li>• Other plastic items, e.g., toys, vinyl shower curtain (and/or non-plastic alternative, e.g., fabric shower curtain)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the recycling symbol when buying or using plastics to make better choices:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoid #3, 6 and 7</li> <li>- Choose #1, 2, 4 and 5</li> <li>- For #1 – think single use</li> </ul> </li> <li>• PVC (vinyl) toys and other items made of vinyl should be avoided (phthalates are commonly use as a softener in PVC plastics)</li> <li>• Older (pre-2011) soft plastic toys/soothers may contain phthalates</li> <li>• Children should be discouraged from putting plastic items (other than toys) in their mouths</li> <li>• Almost all plastics made from petroleum – opportunity to discuss sustainability issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.getdrasticwithplastic.ca">www.getdrasticwithplastic.ca</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Creating Healthy Home Environments for Kids: Top Five Tips</a> video</li> <li>• <i>Get Drastic with Plastic</i> tip card</li> <li>• <i>Playing it Safe: Plastics</i> fact sheet</li> </ul>
<p><b>RENOVATIONS (including energy efficiency retrofits)</b>  <b>Main messages: Renovations, during both demolition and re-building activities, can create exposure to high levels of toxic substances. Pregnant women and children should not be involved in or present during home renovations.</b></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paint brush</li> <li>• Scraper or sandpaper</li> <li>• Solvents/paint remover, plumbing or electrical solvents and glues, sealants for flooring/tiles or labels of any of these containers</li> <li>• Less toxic alternatives with fewer or no hazard symbols</li> <li>• Duct tape, plastic sheeting</li> <li>• Sweeping compound</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paints, finishes, adhesives, construction materials, furnishings can be sources of toxic exposure (e.g., VOCs)</li> <li>• Never scrape, burn or sand old paint (paints used prior to 1978 have high levels of lead; even paints up to 1990 will have some lead content)</li> <li>• Hazard symbols: need to read and follow label instructions</li> <li>• Ensure adequate ventilation during and after renovation</li> <li>• Some toxic substances are unavoidable (e.g., for plumbing sealants) so ventilation is crucial</li> <li>• Need for careful control of dust (plastic sheeting and duct tape to seal off the work area)</li> <li>• Sweeping compound is example of tool to control dust</li> <li>• Dusk mask – important for DIYers and contractors to use personal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.renovate-right.ca">www.renovate-right.ca</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Creating Healthy Home Environments for Kids: Top Five Tips</a> video</li> <li>• <i>Renovate Right</i> brochure (available in 7 languages)</li> <li>• <i>Renovate Right</i> tip card</li> <li>• <i>Safe renovations</i> fact sheet series: <a href="http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/collections/cpche-fact-sheets-feuillets-dinformation-pcsee">http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/collections/cpche-fact-sheets-feuillets-dinformation-pcsee</a></li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dust mask</li> <li>Construction materials or furnishings (e.g., piece of new carpeting)</li> <li>Radon test kit</li> </ul>	<p>protection equipment (PPE) - emphasize that pregnant women should not be involved in renovations; careful selection of PPE to ensure adequate protection (not all dust masks are alike)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternatives are available for choice of new materials (minimal or no synthetic content, choose hard flooring over carpeting, etc.)</li> <li>Important to test all homes for radon, a radioactive gas that comes into homes from surrounding soil and rocks via gaps and cracks in the basement, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of lung cancer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Playing it Safe</i> brochure</li> <li><i>Healthy Retrofits</i> report (CELA)</li> <li><a href="http://www.reduceradon.ca">www.reduceradon.ca</a></li> <li><i>Reduce Radon</i> tip card</li> </ul>
<p><b>CLEANING/DUST EXPOSURES</b>  <b>Main message: For young children, indoor dust is the main route of exposure to many toxic substances.</b></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plastic bag of dryer lint (labelled with “ingredients”)</li> <li>Empty vacuum cleaner bag (similar label)</li> <li>Dust pan</li> <li>Reuseable grocery bag</li> <li>Old foam (in a plastic bag)</li> <li>Cleaning product with multiple hazard symbols</li> <li>Alternative cleaning products without hazard symbols</li> <li>Ingredients for homemade, non-toxic cleaning products, e.g., box of baking soda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House dust, dryer lint and the contents of the vacuum cleaner bag typically contain small amounts of toxic metals like lead and mercury, pesticide residues, flame retardants (PBDEs), perfluorinated chemicals (used to resist water/stains), and other chemicals alongside clothing lint, soil particles, and human and animal hair and skin flakes.</li> <li>For dust pans – suggest regular washing</li> <li>Take care not to release dust when changing the vacuum cleaner bag (pregnant women and children should not do this task)</li> <li>Reusable grocery bag – suggest storing away from cleaning tools to avoid cross-contamination (same for food, toys, etc.)</li> <li>Sample of old foam can be used to show how it disintegrates when exposed to air –suggest covering any exposed foam on furniture or if foam is used as mattress</li> <li>Avoid cleaning products with hazard symbols</li> <li>Choose green/non-toxic cleaners or make your own – cleaning with baking soda, vinegar, etc. is cheaper <i>and</i> safer</li> <li>Activity suggestion: Display a range of cleaning products and invite participants to rank them using coloured cards: red (hazard), yellow (lower or uncertain risk) and green (low/no risk). This is a good exercise in reading labels and for increasing awareness about products.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.bustthatdust.ca">www.bustthatdust.ca</a></li> <li><a href="#">Creating Healthy Home Environments for Kids: Top Five Tips</a> video</li> <li><i>Bust That Dust</i> tip card</li> <li><i>What’s on the Menu Today?: Toys... gadgets... sticky fingers, toxic chemicals in dust?</i> mini-poster</li> <li><a href="http://www.gogreenwhenyouclean.ca">www.gogreenwhenyouclean.ca</a></li> <li>“Clean and Green workshop idea in <i>Playing it Safe</i> manual</li> </ul>

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<p><b>CONSUMER PRODUCTS</b>  <b>Main messages: Consumer products are the source of many toxic substances of concern. It is important to read labels. Labelling requirements within product safety laws are very limited for many toxic substances of concern.</b></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vinyl shower curtain</li> <li>• Fabric shower curtain</li> <li>• Personal care products (body spray, fragranced and/or fragrance-free shampoo, etc.)</li> <li>• Air “fresheners”</li> <li>• Extension cord</li> <li>• Bag of microwave popcorn, paper liners for cupcakes</li> <li>• Personal insect repellents</li> <li>• Pesticides – safer choices, e.g., ant traps containing borax</li> <li>• Common products with multiple hazard symbols (e.g. cleaners)</li> <li>• Photos or cans of wild salmon and Atlantic salmon</li> <li>• Cans of albacore tuna, light tuna</li> <li>• Mercury thermometers (or as a drawing/photo) and non-mercury options</li> <li>• Label/packaging from CFL light bulb (do not use a bulb to avoid risk of breakage)</li> <li>• Asthma puffer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vinyl curtain - “new” smell is phthalates, a toxic chemical associated with endocrine disruption and other health effects</li> <li>• Opportunity to discuss other sources of phthalates (e.g., cleaning and personal care products).</li> <li>• Same vinyl (phthalates) smell if rip vinyl flooring - seal off any exposed edges with tape, ensure ventilation</li> <li>• Fabric shower curtain as a safer alternative (will dry, can be easily washed in the laundry, and no need for plastic liner)</li> <li>• Perfumes, colognes, body sprays, personal care products and air “fresheners”: phthalates often used as part of the fragrances to make the scent linger – avoid fragranced products for this reason and to prevent symptoms that can be triggered by fragrance chemicals, e.g., headaches, runny nose, red eyes in sensitive individuals and/or worsening of asthmatic symptoms.</li> <li>• Extension cord – All electric cords contain lead (3-5%) for heat resistance (lead is a potent neurotoxicant, especially for children). The lead contributes to lead levels in house dust (especially under desks, entertainment centres, any areas with electric cords) and also comes off on your hands. Wash hands after use. Store extension cords separately from any items related to food, ,e.g., kitchen tea towels.</li> <li>• Microwave popcorn bag, cupcake liners - all paper used in cooking contains perfluorinated chemicals linked to cancer and other health concerns</li> <li>• Insect repellents: Read labels – for children never use DEET concentration higher than 10%, do not use insect repellents on infants under 6 months of age; adhere to additional directions pertaining to age and frequency of use on the label</li> <li>• Reading labels is very important – e.g., if you exceed label directions on a pesticide product, you get beyond levels of acceptable risk.</li> <li>• Have participants find the active ingredient on a package of ant traps. Discuss borax as a benign ingredient. (<b>Important</b>: Ensure there are no peanut allergies in the group ahead if time)</li> <li>• Discuss hazard symbols, the main purpose of which is to avoid acute hazard. Very limited consideration of chronic toxicity issues like cancer or impacts on development.</li> <li>• Salmon choices: lower contaminant levels in wild salmon and more sustainable practices – but more expensive; watch for it on-sale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Creating Healthy Home Environments for Kids: Top Five Tips</a> video</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.getdrasticwithplastic.ca">www.getdrasticwithplastic.ca</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.bustthatdust.ca">www.bustthatdust.ca</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.gogreenwhenyouclean.ca">www.gogreenwhenyouclean.ca</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.dishsaferfish.ca">www.dishsaferfish.ca</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.renovate-right.ca">www.renovate-right.ca</a></li> <li>• Tip cards for each of the above “top 5 tips”</li> <li>• <i>Creating Healthy Environments for Kids</i> (top 5 tips brochure)</li> <li>• <i>Playing it Safe</i> brochure</li> <li>• <i>Renovate Right</i> brochure (available in 7 languages)</li> <li>• <i>What’s on the Menu Today?: Toys... gadgets... sticky fingers, toxic chemicals in dust?</i> mini-poster</li> <li>• <i>Playing it Safe</i> fact sheets series: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Plastics</i></li> <li>- <i>Safe Renovations</i></li> <li>- <i>Buying Products for the Child Care Centre</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Child Health and the Environment: A Primer</i></li> <li>• <i>Father’s Day Report</i></li> <li>• <i>Focus on Bisphenol A</i></li> <li>• <i>Advancing Environmental Health in Child Care Settings: A Checklist for Child Care Practitioners and Public Health Inspectors</i></li> <li>• <i>How mercury in your home can</i></li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Albacore tuna, light tuna - discuss fish advisory information; note that light tuna typically has lower levels of mercury than Albacore or “white” tuna</li> <li>• Some mercury sources can be replaced (thermometers), others can’t and need awareness about proper disposal. Look into municipal hazardous waste disposal options for old thermometers, thermostats, etc.</li> <li>• CFLs, while more energy efficient, contain small amounts of mercury. Take extra care when handling CFLs and avoid using them in locations where breakage is likely. Discuss proper clean-up procedure if a bulb breaks (do NOT use the vacuum). See <a href="#">Health Canada website</a> for instructions on clean-up. Discuss proper disposal of CFLs: return to participating stores for recycling.</li> <li>• Asthma puffer: large numbers of children with asthma, discuss indoor and outdoor air pollution sources</li> </ul>	<p><i>affect you and what you can do about it</i> (Pollution Probe booklet)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provincial fish advisories</li> <li>• <i>Eat Fish for Health</i> (Region of Peel, Ontario)</li> </ul>

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