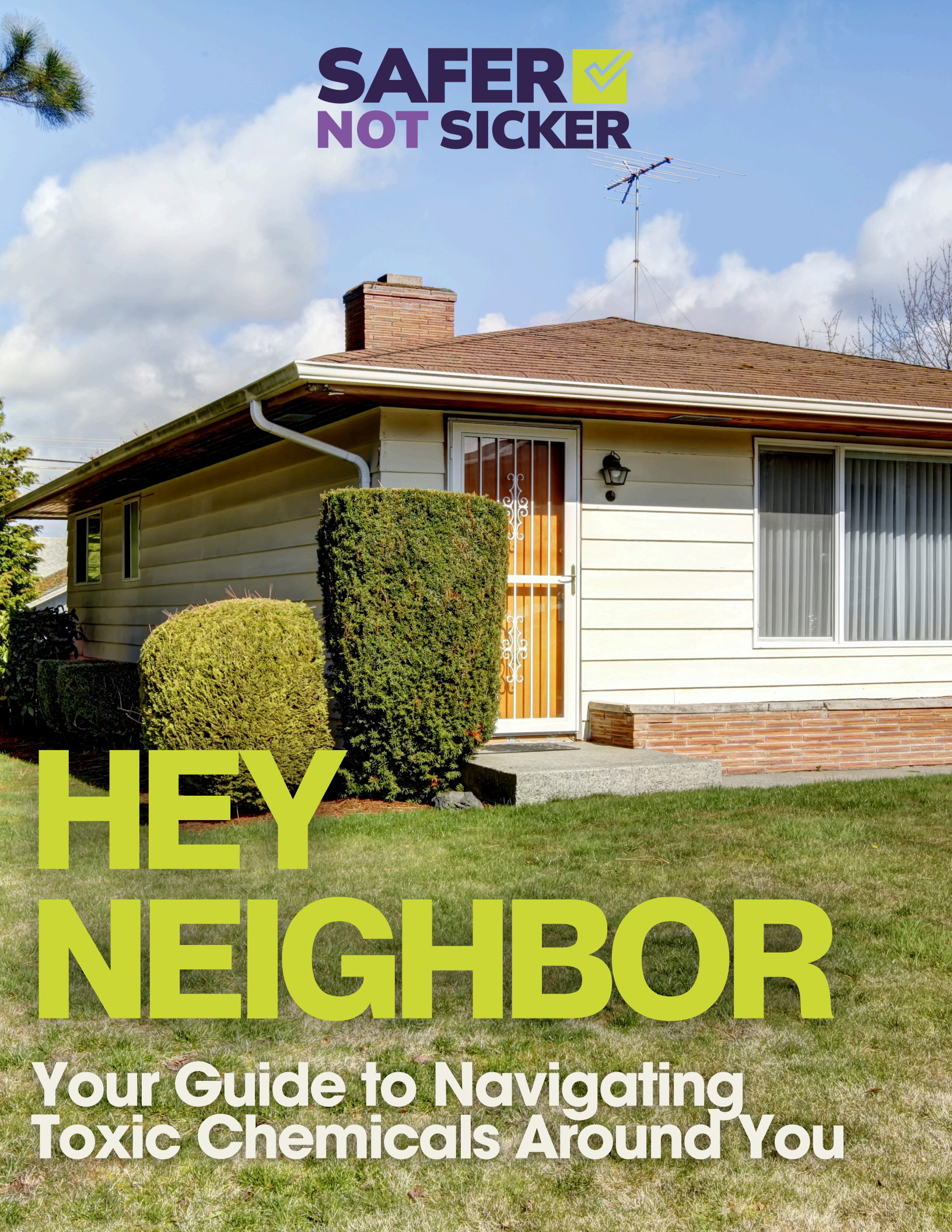


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HEY NEIGHBOR

**Your Guide to Navigating
Toxic Chemicals Around You**



Welcome, Friends and Neighbors!

Toxic chemicals and pollutants are part of everyday life—in the food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the products we use in our homes and communities. Many of these exposures are invisible, difficult to avoid, and linked to serious health concerns.

At the same time, safeguards designed to protect people's health are being weakened, giving companies that pollute more leeway while families carry more of the risk.

Families cannot filter their way out of systemic pollution. Toxic chemicals must be addressed at the source through strong safeguards, independent science, and government protections that put people's health first.

This guide can help you better understand some of the common ways toxic exposures may show up in everyday life—and why stronger protections are needed to keep all of us **Safer, Not Sicker**.

Get involved! [Sign our petition](#) calling for stronger safeguards that reduce toxic pollution at the source—not after families are already exposed.

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The EPA must put our health first.

Toxic Exposures Checklist

Every day, you come into contact with toxic chemicals and pollutants—in the food you eat, the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the household products you use. Most of them are invisible and your exposure is not always your personal choice. Even small, everyday exposures can add up over time.

This checklist will help you spot common sources of health risk exposures in your own life. Some may be familiar. Others may surprise you. But none of them should be your responsibility to manage alone.

Inside My Home, Do I:

- Live in a home built before 1978?
- Have recently renovated or newly built spaces?
- Have stain-resistant or synthetic carpet, rugs or flooring?
- Have furniture made with pressed board or water-resistant fabric?
- Have pets that come in and out of the house frequently?
- Have young children who crawl, play on floors, or frequently put objects in their mouths?

My Water (Drinking, Bathing, Cooking), Do I:

- Live in a home with older plumbing (before 1986)?
- Drink unfiltered tap water?
- Shower or bathe in unfiltered tap water?
- Drink water from plastic bottles?
- Use tap water to make infant formula or kid's drinks?
- Use well water?

What I Eat and Serve, Do I:

- Eat seafood regularly?
- Eat non-organic fruits and vegetables?
- Store or heat food in plastic containers?
- Eat food from fast-food wrappers, microwave bags, or coated packaging?
- Use nonstick cookware or black plastic utensils?
- Eat locally hunted meat?

The Stuff Around Me, Do I:

- Dry clean my clothes?
- Use aerosol deodorants or hair sprays?
- Use hair products or makeup regularly?
- Use aerosol sprays (for air freshening, bugs, or cleaning)?
- Use candles, air fresheners, or scented products?
- Use cleaning products with chemicals or solvents?

Where I Spend My Time, Do I live, work, or spend time:

- In a place with frequent air quality alerts (smog, wildfire smoke)?
- Near a busy street, highway, or parking lot?
- Near an industrial site, large farm, or waste site?
- In a place where I notice a strong chemical smell indoors or nearby?
- In places where chemicals are used or sprayed (parks, playgrounds, sports fields, golf courses)?

Where I Work, Do I:

- Work with chemicals, solvents, fuels, or industrial materials?
- Work in cleaning, construction, healthcare, beauty services, auto repair, or manufacturing?
- Come home from work before changing clothes or shoes?

Many of these exposures have been linked to health concerns like cancer, asthma, developmental issues, and fertility challenges—but they're often invisible and hard to trace back to a single source. [**Learn More.**](#)

What your checks mean for you

If you checked many boxes, you may be upset—and you're not alone.

Most Americans are exposed to multiple harmful chemicals every day, often without knowing it. It's part of modern life, and can feel like a lot to take in. You may even be wondering if your health issues, or those of your family, could be connected to these everyday exposures. The boxes you checked may be linked to some of the following everyday exposure risks.

Inside My Home (Formaldehyde, PFAS, Lead, Pesticides)

These can irritate the lungs and, over time, may contribute to respiratory problems and other health concerns.

- Homes built before 1978 may contain lead paint and lead dust
- Newly renovated or newly built spaces can release chemicals like formaldehyde into indoor air
- Some carpets, flooring, and stain-resistant fabrics may contain PFAS (“forever chemicals”)
- Pressed wood furniture can release formaldehyde over time
- Pets that go in and out can track pesticides and other pollutants indoors
- Young children are more likely to inhale dust or put contaminated hands and objects in their mouths

My Water (PFAS, Lead, Microplastics, Pesticides, Mercury, Perchlorate)

These can harm your hormones, fertility, gut, and nervous system, and increase your cancer risk. They can also cause brain damage and impact overall development in children.

- Older plumbing may contain lead or other heavy metals
- Unfiltered tap water can contain contaminants, including PFAS, heavy metals, or pesticides
- Chemicals in shower and bath water may be inhaled in steam or absorbed through the skin
- Plastic water bottles can shed microplastics into drinking water
- Well water may be vulnerable to contamination from nearby farms, factories, coal plants, or waste sites

What I Eat and Serve (Mercury, PFAS, Pesticides, Microplastics)

Over time, these can cause hormone disruption, developmental delays, and damage to your immune system. They also may increase your risk of cancer.

- Some seafood contains mercury, PFAS, and other contaminants that build up in the body over time
- Non-organic produce may contain pesticide residues
- Heating or storing food in plastic can transfer chemicals and microplastics into food
- Fast-food wrappers, microwave bags, and coated packaging may contain PFAS chemicals
- Nonstick cookware and black plastic utensils can release chemicals when heated or worn down
- Locally hunted meat may contain contaminants depending on local pollution exposures

The Stuff Around Me (Formaldehyde, Phthalates, Arsenic)

These have been linked to respiratory problems, hormone disruption, developmental impacts, and increased cancer risk.

- Dry cleaning chemicals can remain on clothing after cleaning
- Some personal care products contain chemicals that get inhaled or absorbed through the skin
- Everyday low-level exposure from multiple products can build up over time
- Aerosol sprays, air fresheners, candles, and scented products contain chemicals such as formaldehyde and phthalates that can affect indoor air quality
- Some cleaning products release chemicals or particles into the air and onto surfaces

Where I Spend My Time (Smog, Soot, Ozone, Benzene)

Over time, this kind of exposure is linked to higher risks of asthma, heart disease, and cancer. Children's developing lungs are especially vulnerable.

- Air quality alerts may indicate exposure to smog, soot, wildfire smoke, or ozone pollution
- Living near busy roads increases exposure to vehicle exhaust and fine particle pollution
- Industrial sites, farms, and waste facilities can release harmful chemicals into nearby air, soil, and water
- Strong chemical smells may signal airborne pollutants or chemical releases nearby
- Parks, playgrounds, and sports fields treated with pesticides or weed killers can expose children and families to chemical residues during everyday play and activities

Where I Work (Benzene, Formaldehyde, TCE or Trichloroethylene)

These have been linked to respiratory illness, Parkinson's disease and other neurological damage, reproductive and fertility problems, developmental harms, and increased cancer risk.

- Some jobs may increase ongoing exposure to chemicals through repeated day-to-day contact
- Residue from workplace chemicals can travel home on clothing, shoes, or equipment



What you can do

If you want to take steps to reduce exposure, there are a few small things that can help—especially at home.

If it works for your life and budget, you might choose to filter your water, store food in glass instead of plastic, or be mindful about certain products like cleaning supplies or pesticides. But these options aren't always simple, affordable, or realistic for everyone, and they don't solve the bigger problem. You can do what you can, when you can—and even small steps, where they're manageable, can help.

What you can't fix

At the same time, some things are simply outside your control.

You can't control what's in your local water supply. You can't just move to a neighborhood with cleaner air. You can't always know what's in the products you buy. You can't stop your town from spraying toxic weed killer on ball fields and in parks.

And you can't control the shortcuts big chemical, agriculture, energy and other corporate polluters take to put cost savings over our health.

Why you alone can't fix it

Most of the exposures you checked are built into how things are made and managed.

We rely on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) public health safeguards to help address:

- Pollution in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the soil around us
 - Harmful chemicals used in agriculture and many everyday products
 - Aging pipes, buildings, and water systems
 - Companies putting cost savings ahead of Americans' health or breaking rules meant to keep communities safe
-

What we're fighting for

No family should get sick from causes that could have been prevented.

Families shouldn't have to carry this burden alone. Together, we can push for stronger safeguards that keep harmful pollution out of our homes, air, water, and communities in the first place.

A Little Background



What is the role of the EPA?

The job of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is to set and enforce protections. These public servants work for all of us. EPA:

- Decides which chemicals can be used and how they can be used safely
- Inspects farms, factories, and companies to make sure these rules are followed

If a company breaks the rules and puts people at risk, EPA can take legal action.

How is the public involved?

Whenever EPA proposes a new rule about a toxic chemical or wants to change an existing one, the agency must open a public comment period. This gives local residents, health experts, community groups, farmers, and others a chance to share concerns, recommend changes, and help shape final rules.

What role does Congress play?

A big one. Congress writes the laws that give EPA its power and decides EPA's budget each year. That budget determines:

- How many scientists can review pesticides
- How many inspectors can check for problems
- How quickly EPA can act

When EPA funding is reduced, it can be harder to catch problems early, keep companies accountable, and protect people's health. Fewer staff and resources mean reduced safety checks, including diminished risk assessment, monitoring, public reporting, and a smaller number of inspectors. States also get funding through EPA, so federal dollars determine if states can meet basic health and safety goals.



What is the state and local government role?

State and local governments help monitor air, water, and soil, and are often the public's most direct connection to chemical oversight. These agencies receive funding to help enforce EPA rules, and may add their own local requirements as long as they are at least as strict as federal standards.

What is EPN's role?

At the Environmental Protection Network (EPN), we know this work well. **We are former EPA scientists, toxicologists, engineers, chemists, and public health experts who spent our careers putting human health safeguards in place and enforcing those rules with industry.** We know how safeguards are built and what happens when they are compromised, weakened, or removed.

Join us in calling for stronger safeguards and protections that put people's health first—so all of us can be **Safer, Not Sicker.**

[Learn more and sign our petition.](#)

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