



## Center for Health, Environment & Justice

### PRESS RELEASE

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### **School Supplies Pose Toxic Threat to Children's Health**

*CHEJ Offers New Guide to Help Parents Make Safer Choices for Back-to-School Shopping in Over 20 Product Categories*

**Falls Church, VA** – The Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ) is releasing a new ***Back to School Guide to PVC-Free School Supplies*** for parents to choosing safer, PVC-free school supplies in over 20 product categories. The guide is being released just in time for this coming weekend's important retail season: tax-free back-to-school shopping. Parents across the country are stocking up on binders and lunchboxes. But while it's easy to know the healthiest foods to pack in those lunchboxes, many parents are not aware of the toxic plastic used to make them. In fact, the average child's character-themed backpack is filled with supplies and materials made from one of the most toxic plastics, polyvinyl chloride (PVC or vinyl).

"Numerous studies have found that young children are particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of chemicals released by PVC. Last year, the government banned phthalates commonly used in PVC from children's toys. These known hazardous chemicals were banned from our children's toys, but can still be found in school supplies marketed directly for young children," said Mike Schade, CHEJ's PVC Campaign Coordinator. "Parents can easily protect their children by shopping PVC-free. There are many safer PVC-free products available and even being sold alongside the toxic PVC items at your local retailer. Read the labels, and give your child a healthy start to the new school year."

Although this toxic plastic is found in many name-brand products, parents can find safer PVC-free products. CHEJ is releasing the expanded 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Edition of their popular ***Back to School Guide to PVC-Free School Supplies*** to help parents make informed shopping choices. Over twenty categories of school supplies, from backpacks to art supplies, are covered in the guide. As a companion piece to the full guide, a pocket guide with top-tips and at-a-glance advice is also available. A few of the top tips for avoiding toxic PVC school supplies are:

1. Avoid backpacks with shiny plastic designs as they often contain PVC and may contain lead.
2. Use cloth lunchboxes or metal lunchboxes. Many lunchboxes are made of PVC, or coated with PVC on the inside.
3. Used cardboard, fabric-covered, or polypropylene binders. Most 3-ring binders are made of PVC.

Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) is unique among plastics because it contains dangerous chemical additives used to soften or stabilize it. These harmful chemicals include phthalates, lead, cadmium, and/or organotins,

which can be toxic to a child's health. Over 90% of all phthalates are used in PVC products such as school supplies. Federal law has banned the use of phthalates in children's toys, but not children's school supplies and other PVC products found in schools. Lunchboxes, binders, vinyl backpacks, and even art supplies are frequently made out of PVC.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the harmful health effects of toxic chemicals used in PVC. Recent studies have linked PVC flooring in the home to increased rates of autism and asthma in children. Chemicals that evaporate or leech out of PVC products may contribute to developmental disorders and damage to the liver, central nervous, respiratory and reproductive systems.

***For a copy of the PVC-Free Back-to-School Guide, visit [www.chej.org](http://www.chej.org). To arrange an interview with a CHEJ expert on PVC and toxic threats to children's health, contact Moira Bulloch at 703-237-2249 ext.19 or by email at [mbulloch@chej.org](mailto:mbulloch@chej.org)***

#### **About CHEJ**

The Center for Health, Environment & Justice exists to mentor the movement to build healthier communities by empowering people to prevent harm in as many ways, and for as many people, as possible. We believe this can happen when people and groups have the power to play an integral role in promoting human health and environmental integrity. CHEJ's role is to provide the tools, the direction, and the encouragement to these people and groups, so that they can build strong, healthy communities where they live, work, learn, shop, play and pray. Following her successful effort to prevent further harm for the people living in contaminated Love Canal, Lois Gibbs founded CHEJ in 1981 in order to continue mentoring others seeking to prevent harm. CHEJ provides mentoring assistance to communities, homeowners, families and individuals throughout the country. To date, CHEJ has assisted over 10,000 groups nationwide. Currently, CHEJ is mentoring community groups in Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina and Ohio. Details on CHEJ's efforts to help people and communities prevent harm can be found at <http://chej.org/> .