

Media Center Press Release

[Main page](#) | [Archive](#)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press contact: Jenny Powers, 212/727-4566 or 646/522-8949 (cell)

If you are not a member of the press, please write to us at nrdcinfo@nrdc.org or see our [contact page](#).

New Study: Common Air Fresheners Contain Chemicals That May Affect Human Reproductive Development

Environmental Group Calls for Additional Testing, Consumer Awareness to Prevent Risky Exposure

NEW YORK (September 19, 2007) – An analysis of more than a dozen common household air fresheners found that most contain chemicals that may affect hormones and reproductive development, particularly in babies, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) said today. The federal government does not currently test air fresheners for safety or require manufacturers to meet any specific safety standards. The study offers both consumers and officials new information on the risks certain air fresheners pose.

"More than anything, our research highlights cracks in our safety system," said Dr. Gina Solomon, NRDC senior scientist.

"Consumers have a right to know what is put into air fresheners and other everyday products they bring into their homes," Solomon added. "There are too many products on the shelves that we assume are safe, but have never even been tested. The government should be keeping a watchful eye on these household items and the manufacturers who produce them."

NRDC tested 14 different brands of common household air fresheners and found that 12 contained the hormone-disrupting chemicals known as phthalates. Only two, Febreze Air Effects and Renuzit Subtle Effects, contained no detectable levels of phthalates. The products that tested positive included ones marketed as "all-natural" and "unscented." None had phthalates in the list of ingredients or anywhere else on the label. The three with the highest level of phthalates were Walgreens Air Freshener, Walgreens Scented Bouquet, and Ozium Glycolized Air Sanitizer.

While consumers should be concerned about the chemicals, NRDC stressed that there is no cause for panic. The chemicals pose their greatest risk over long term repeated exposure.

In conjunction with the study, NRDC, along with the Sierra Club, Alliance for Healthy Homes and the National Center for Healthy Housing, are filing a petition to the EPA and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) today. The petition calls for the EPA and CPSC to start assessing the risk air fresheners pose to consumers by comprehensively testing all air freshener products on the market. NRDC said it also looking forward to working with the air freshener industry to find ways to eliminate phthalates from their products.

Air fresheners are now a \$1.72 billion industry in the United States – a 50 percent increase from 2003 – with an estimated 75 percent of households using air fresheners. Despite the industry's size, it is minimally regulated, not having to meet any standards specific to their products. Air fresheners are not tested for a variety of chemicals, including phthalates, because the government does not require it.

"Manufacturers are getting away with marketing products as 'natural' when they're not, and that's because no one is stopping them," said Mae Wu, an attorney in NRDC's health program. "Our research suggests this could be a widespread problem in a booming industry that – so far – has been allowed to do what it wants."

The tests, believed to be the first in the United States, cover only a fraction of the air freshener market. Tests included aerosol sprays, liquids that emit a continuous scent and a solid. The phthalates in the air fresheners may be inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

"There are plenty of good alternatives," Dr. Solomon said. "The best way to avoid the problem is to simply open a window instead of reaching for one of these cans."

Phthalates are hormone-disrupting chemicals that can be particularly dangerous for young children and unborn babies. Exposure to phthalates can affect testosterone levels and lead to reproductive abnormalities, including abnormal genitalia and reduced sperm production. The State of California notes that five types of phthalates—including one that we found in air freshener products—are "known to cause birth defects or reproductive harm." Young children and pregnant women should be especially careful to avoid contact with these chemicals.

NRDC recommends that consumers who purchase air fresheners be selective and purchase those that have the least amount of phthalates.

NRDC also suggests consumers first try to reduce home odors by improving home ventilation. Since fresheners only mask odors rather than address them, tending to the root cause of the odor is a first step to tackling the problem.

The Natural Resources Defense Council is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has 1.2 million members and online activists, served from offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Beijing.

Related Links:

[Clearing the Air - Hidden Hazards of Air Fresheners](#)

[OnEarth Magazine, Winter 2006 - Bad Chemistry: A Special Report](#)