Plastics Keep Coming after You: a Comprehensive Report and a Call to Action

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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"Coming after You" means both your legacy of non-biodegradable plastics and that they are out to kill you. Now that the hilarious double entendre is out of the way, we can go on to our patient heroines. The nurturing, brave journalists about to be presented are patient as heroines and they succor untold numbers of unknown patients suffering from plastic-caused diseases. For you hardy men who may not care about this girly-men stuff, and pride yourselves in being out to have a good time, keep in mind that erectile dysfunction is on the rise thanks to plastics.

Our problems keep multiplying when our beloved "free market" ensures that only a few chemicals out of thousands from industry get thoroughly tested and approved before being unleashed. Why and how? Politics is a game of corruption, so those with the most money get to win almost all the time. Therefore, if there are health risks from petrochemicals, radiation such as EMFs, and climate disruption, we victims are told by the corporate state to remain dutiful and grateful. Let the experts take care of everything, and have Hope.

And what's the big bother? Wake up each morning, have breakfast on the run, get to work (if you're employed), and ingest all the while the ubiquitous plastics that seem harmless. All day long between tasks we keep fantasizing about what we really want: freedom to hike in the mountains right this minute, visit with friends and family, indulge in sex and revelry, paint or compose a masterpiece, and not have to worry about sickness, financial pressures or violence either in one's face or the wars we fund.

One can't easily deal with multiple onslaughts and play the survival game as modern consumers or dispossessed peasants, so most people do nothing about threats. After all, to take action is to go up against bureaucracy backed by the police and military. So the common people are forced to wait until they begin to starve before snapping and going on a rampage.

Since we don't know exactly when the bubble of global trade and the precarious petroleum-based food system will collapse, it is fortunate that a few brave activists, artists and journalists keep calling our attention to the destruction of life. By now most everyone has heard of the massive plastic garbage patches in the oceans. The ramifications are as little explored as measures considered to cease the discharge. Remedies are available on all levels if we open our eyes and start communicating. But we must be willing to turn our backs on much of what we've been conditioned to believe: the supreme and righteous power of technology, that governments represent the common people, and that the world we inherited will automatically be here for our descendants.

Two reporters have laid out before us all we need to know about the plastic plague's insidious invasion of our bodies, in two articles highlighted below. Steve Mosko and Amy Graff, of southern California and the San Francisco Bay area, respectively, have provided alarming statistics and valuable insight. We have increasing amounts of deadly plastics molecules in each of us, and industry makes sure this continues. As to the solutions, these reporters/researchers leave it to the individual: get the poison products out of your home, and pressure the politicians to do the right things.

But when Coca Cola and industry lobbies are scheming behind closed doors to destroy our health and torpedo legislation, as happened last year in California where bisphenol-A (BPA) was about to be banned in baby products, we are thwarted in the land of democracy. We have found out that it's really a democracy for the rich, as the recent Supreme Court decision endorsing corporate funding of elections revealed. This takes us back to my initial point: politics is a game of corruption. So the mission of progressive and radical journalism and activism is crucial: to lay out a course that recognizes the failure of modern society to cease devouring its own members. Until it ceases, enshrined in law and false tradition -- like Coca Cola advertisements confused with art -- is the Red-White-and-Blue enrichment of the blind elite fouling their own nests as well as our bodies.

Fight the plastic plague:

(1) Pressure your local and state representatives in government to ban the plastics described below, along with large retail outlets' distribution of free plastic petroleum bags.

(2) Boycott corporations such as Coca Cola that rely on trashing the planet and our health for corporate profits. Boycott petroleum to the extent possible.

(3) Talk to friends and family members about getting plastics out of their diet.

(4) Learn about the shortcomings of recycling plastic and so-called bioplastics. Better to shut down the use of plastics than to fall into the trap of picking some plastics to be alright.

(5) Donate to nonprofit groups such as Algalita Marine Research Foundation which produced the award-winning documentary "Our Synthetic Sea."

(6) Go on a fast to remove plastics from your cells.

Steve Mosko alerts us to three extreme threats that most of us ignore:

Perfluorinated Compounds (PFCs)

These are in non-stick cookware and grease/water-resistant packaging (e.g. for fast foods). Ninety-eight percent of blood samples have been found to contain PFCs such as PFOA and PFOS. Breast milk contaminated with PFOA and PFOS was detected in 98% of Massachusetts women participating in a 2004 study.

The list of potential health effects linked to PFCs in human and animals studies is long and includes cancers, high cholesterol, liver and developmental toxicity, thyroid hormone disruption, and infertility.

No U.S. jurisdiction has yet limited the used of PFOA or PFOS in food-contact substances. Until then, cut way back on your "take out" meals and get yourself an iron pan and steel pot for your cooking.

Brominated Flame Retardants

Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) are a family of flame retardants in widespread use in consumer products, including plastics for electronics and electrical devices.

PBDEs were found in nearly 100% of blood samples in a major 2003-2004 survey. Consumption of meat, fish and dairy

products is thought to be a primary route of exposure.

However, it was the discovery of infant exposure to PBDEs via rising levels in human breast milk in the United States and Europe that set off a chorus of alarm about health risks to humans.

PBDEs have been marketed in the United States in three commercial mixtures, so-called penta, octa and deca formulations. Animal data link penta and octa to serious health impairments – including liver, thyroid & reproductive toxicity and especially developmental neurotoxicity.

Bisphenol-A, phthalates, and more

Hundreds of recent studies connect BPA to a diversity of problems like early puberty, miscarriage, breast and prostate cancer, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cardiac arrhythmias and male erectile dysfunction. Harmful effects in lab animals are seen at exposure levels far below what the EPA has considered safe.

Birth defects among affluent Americans are getting more common, in part from BPA which is in almost everyone's urine. It is ironic that the main crisis in birth defects today is in Fallujah, where U.S. militarism inflicted such death and destruction that fully 25% of babies born have serious birth defects. The U.S. citizen obliviously paying taxes for such war might ask "Why do birth defects have to happen to us peaceful consumers? Perhaps Obama gives hope in solving this, too."

Endocrine disruptors can be synthetic estrogen or other substances from plastics or pesticides, accounting for feminization of fish populations, for example. Phthalates, the softeners in plastics, and chemicals in hairspray account for a big rise in the shrinking of anal-genital distance in newborn boys -- a feminization. In a lab rat study in 2001, "[E]xposure to the most prevalent phthalate ester, di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), on male reproductive system development and sexual behavior" showed "Dose-related effects on male offspring included reduced anogenital distance, areola and nipple retention, undescended testes, and permanently incomplete preputial separation." (see chart)

The European Union's banning of phthalates is progress, but the extent of the problem is endless. PVC, perhaps the most poisonous of plastics, is still out of control everywhere. These concessions to the warnings of science hint at a shocking reality that may be looming: human extinction, from one cause or another, or a combination. It's harder and harder to limit the discussion anymore.

Effort to ban BPA in California fails

In February 2009, a bill was introduced to ban BPA from infant formula cans and baby bottles and cups. In September that bill failed to pass in the Assembly. Why?

In The Mommy Files, a local mom's take on raising kids by the Bay, Amy Graff wrote in the San Francisco Chronicle on Sept. 16 2009: