

SCIENCE INTO ACTION: PRHE's Impact on Public Policy

People are exposed to increasing amounts of toxic chemicals in air, food, water, personal care and cleaning products, at home and at work. The Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment was founded to research where these chemicals come from, how they get into our bodies, how they affect our health, and what we need to do about it. We focus on pregnancy as it is an extremely vulnerable period of human development.

We turn our science into action by providing it to policymakers, regulators, and health care professionals and informing policies that help to protect children, families, and communities.

STRENGTHEN CHEMICAL POLICY

- **Improve Standards to Assess Chemical Risks:** PRHE identifies and communicates how science should be used in policymaking to protect health. PRHE has been a leading scientific voice on EPA's problematic implementation of the updated [Toxic Substances Control Act \(TSCA\)](#). Our [40+ public comments](#) on EPA's use of non-scientific methods for evaluating chemical risks, and inadequate consideration of vulnerable populations, among others, help lay the groundwork for court decisions requiring EPA to fulfill its mission. Our work led to a breakthrough on risk assessments of legacy chemicals (chemicals that are still around and to which we are exposed) and a review of problems with EPA's TSCA Systematic Review Method by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.
- **Protect Pregnant Women:** As the first to document dozens of chemicals in the blood of pregnant women, PRHE is a leader in research that makes the case that pregnant women should be considered "at risk." We partnered with the University of Michigan on a study that found physiological changes during pregnancy, such as a [40% increase](#) in the amount of air pregnant women breathe, puts them at greater



PRHE Director/Professor Tracey J. Woodruff, PhD, MPH, and Emory Nursing School Dean Linda McCauley, RN, PhD, FAAN following PRHE's 2017 Congressional Briefing on how EPA regulatory rollbacks affect children's health.

risk of adverse effects of air pollution. [Our review of 11 studies of over 1.3 million pregnant women](#) to examine how ozone and particulate matter affect blood pressure problems during pregnancy demonstrated how the current EPA is ignoring its mandate to protect vulnerable populations under the Clean Air Act. PRHE's work is expected to help limit the allowable levels of air pollution where pregnant women may be exposed.

- **Brief Congress on Why Science Matters:** PRHE led Capitol Hill briefings in 2017 and 2018 to examine [how EPA matters to children's health](#) and [whether the new TSCA is working as Congress intended](#). Dozens of congressional staff attended and hundreds viewed live webcasts featuring leading scientists explaining the latest science on assessing

chemical risks to pregnant women, workers, and communities of color and how rolling back environmental protections increase children's health risks. We partnered with the Children's Environmental Health Network and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) on the events.

PROTECT CONSUMERS

- **Ban Flame Retardant Chemicals:** PRHE's evidence and testimony were pivotal in San Francisco's 2019 adoption of the [Flame Retardant Chemicals in Upholstered Furniture and Juvenile Products Ordinance](#) which bans the sale of all flame-retardant chemicals in upholstered furniture in the city. Our testimony also influenced the Consumer Product Safety Commission to recommend a ban on halogenated flame retardants, which is now law in California.
- **Limit Toxic Pesticides:** PRHE was part of the nation's Children's Environmental Health Research Centers. Science from these centers produced evidence on the pesticide chlorpyrifos – linked to brain damage and other health defects in children - used by [California's Scientific Review Panel on Toxic Air Contaminants](#) to ban the sale of the toxic pesticide in the state in 2020.

IMPROVE HEALTH CARE

- **Integrate Environmental Health in Health Care:** In 2013, PRHE provided scientific evidence for a [committee opinion](#) of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) Committee on Health Care of Underserved Women and the American Society for Reproductive Medicine Practice Committee on the association between exposure to toxic environmental chemicals and reproductive health and the need for timely action to identify and reduce such exposures.
- **Advocate Policies to Reduce Toxic Chemical Exposures:** In 2015, PRHE co-authored an opinion by the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), the leading global voice of reproductive health professionals, on the reproductive health impacts of exposure to toxic chemicals. With 125 countries/territories among FIGO's Member Societies, its actions influence medical practice and public policy around the world. The groundbreaking statement was unveiled at FIGO's 2015 summit, which PRHE commemorated with [video and educational materials](#).

STRENGTHEN SCIENCE

- **A Leader in Children's Health Research:** With ADHD, autism, neurodevelopmental delays, obesity, and diabetes on the rise among children, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) launched the Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) initiative, which will track over 50,000 children from birth to adolescence. PRHE helped to identify which chemicals are being included in the study and created a new evidence-based screening method for biomonitoring toxics. Our work with a diverse group of pregnant women will help us better understand how environmental chemicals and stress from racism, poverty, and food insecurity increases the risk of poor pregnancy outcomes and children's development. Once complete, the ECHO study will be the largest to date to examine the effects of chemicals on children's health.
- **Innovate Scientific Methods:** In 2009, PRHE developed the [Navigation Guide](#) systematic review methodology that has since been endorsed and applied by the National Academy of Sciences, the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labor Organization (ILO), and demonstrated in six proof-of-concept studies. The WHO and ILO are currently utilizing the Navigation Guide systematic review methodology to assess the global work-related burden of disease and injury from exposure to occupational risk factors, which involves more than 200 experts from over 30 countries.