

# **MassCOSH Outreach Report for: *Toxics Use Reduction Institute 5 Chemical Survey***

## **Overview:**

Labor won a groundbreaking legislative victory in 2005 requiring the state to provide information on replacing toxic chemicals with safer alternatives for 5 toxic chemicals. (Lead, formaldehyde, perchloroethylene, hexavalent chromium, and di-(2 ethylhexyl)phthalate (DEHP). The Mass AFL-CIO and the Labor Advisory Committee for the statewide Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow ([www.healthytomorrow.org](http://www.healthytomorrow.org)) fought hard to reverse a Romney veto and to get this study funded. The study looked at the technical and economic feasibility of using the safer alternatives and provided a comparison of the environmental, health and safety characteristics as they apply to workers, consumers and the environment.

## **MassCOSH Outreach Project:**

The 5 Chemical Study is just the first step in changing the way we approach eliminating chemical hazards in our workplace and communities. MassCOSH conducted a pilot outreach project to investigate union awareness and use of the chemicals and their safer alternatives in the TURI 5 Chemical Study. This report includes information we received from conducting outreach - using a short survey on the TURI 5 Chemical Study. During the spring of 2006 we approached 25 union locals, 11 labor councils and 8 health and safety activists.

## **Highlights from our outreach on TURI 5 Chemical Study**

- 20 unions responded -5 were aware of safer alternatives but may not be using them.
- A small portion of Auto shops surveyed by MASSCOSH with the “Boston Safe Shops Project” use water based substitute for PERC-we are monitoring their experiences.
- Majority of unions responded that they lacked information about the chemical hazards but were interested in more information and would consider using safer alternatives.
- Many union representatives contacted had never been asked about the specific chemicals and they lack the training to fully evaluate their use or to assess the alternatives.
- Some unions were familiar with a general brand/term for alternatives such as linoleum but were stumped by the technical chemical names such as Volatile methyl siloxane.
- Generally it is a given that chemicals are hazardous and the goal is to learn how to work safely with them or to limit exposure – not to find safer chemicals.
- Use of safer alternatives in workplaces is not tracked in ways that the unions were aware of.
- Because of the short timeframe of the pilot outreach project we didn’t make enough contacts at the shop floor level. Some people surveyed were more knowledgeable about chemicals because they were health and safety committee chairs or have had extra training.

## **Recommendations**

- A labor briefing for union representatives, health and safety officers and key allies will be organized to share the results of the TURI 5 chemical study.
- Materials have been developed that are “worker friendly” and that provide some tools to identify chemical components of the products they work with or manufacture.
- Presentations to educate union members about TURI and the idea of the safer substitutes approach (a precautionary principle) is key to developing new health and safety strategies in the workplace .
- The Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI) needs to develop more formal ties with key Massachusetts Unions to significantly involve labor in future work on safer substitutes.