

Adolescent Education Program Commended Locally and Nationally

Susan Schwartz, Education Director

Zero Breast Cancer is pleased to share these recent developments with our readers, donors and community supporters who have contributed to the accomplishments of our adolescent education program:

Zero Breast Cancer's adolescent education program has gained recognition in the national media. In a special health and wellness edition (February 2009) of the *U.S. News & World Report*, journalist Katherine Hobson explores indicators for communicating about breast cancer risk with teen girls, including the potential for promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors beginning in adolescence that may have breast cancer risk-reduction benefits later on. The article, titled "Preventing Breast Cancer 101: A growing number of programs teach young girls the real risks and how to lower them", identifies innovative programs and medical experts that are leading efforts to educate adolescents and younger women about known and suspected risk factors for breast cancer, presenting factual information to motivate this age group to adopt lifelong healthy lifestyles. Zero Breast Cancer is quoted for introducing precautionary messages about avoiding environmental exposures as part of the *Breast Cancer and Environment – Peer Education Tool Kit*, developed through ZBC's groundbreaking pilot project with Sir Francis Drake High School in Marin County in 2006 (http://www.zerobreastcancer.org/education/zbc_ap_coverage.html). Ms. Hobson's report cites additional breast cancer preventive measures that are relevant to adolescent girls: engaging in regular exercise/physical activity, maintaining a lean body weight, and avoiding excessive alcohol use. "Preventing Breast Cancer 101" is available on the *U.S. News & World Report* website: <http://health.usnews.com/articles/health/childrens-health/2008/11/11/preventing-breast-cancer-101.html>

ZBC's bilingual Latina brochure, "*Breast Cancer Tips for Latina Teens, Young Women and Families*", produced through ZBC's Latina Adolescent Outreach Project, debuted on the December 15th "Encuentro Latino" show, the first all-Spanish language television program produced in Marin County, airing on Novato Public Access Television/ Channel 26. ZBC staff appeared with key Marin agencies that serve the Latino community. Angelica Quirarte, ZBC's youth advocate for the Latina Adolescent Outreach Project, described in Spanish ZBC's Latina brochure and invited the viewing audience to attend ZBC's February community education forum for younger women. Susan Schwartz, ZBC Education Program Director, Angelica Quirarte, and Latina high school students and their teachers collaborated with ZBC to create the bilingual brochure with information resources for Latina teens and women. To view ZBC's new bilingual Latina brochure, visit: http://www.zerobreastcancer.org/education/zbc_latinabrochespnl.pdf

The Problem With Flame Retardants

By Eve Harris

When a friend recently recounted how she struggled to find the right mattress for her preschool daughter, I was half listening. Fire safety? Toxic chemicals? She said it would be shipped from Southern California and although she was discreet about the price, I later learned that in California a legal mattress free of toxic flame retardants could cost quite a lot. Here are some of the other things I learned:

Which toxins are in mattresses?

The chemicals under the most scrutiny are man-made, polybrominated diphenyl ethers, known collectively as PBDEs. Three different commercial formulations, known as tetra-, penta- and decaBDE were used in consumer products in the US beginning in the 1970s. PBDEs are not chemically bound to the products they are used in and thus are prone to leaching into the environment, where they persist. Like other persistent organic toxins, they have an affinity for fats. (*EPA factsheet*)

People encounter PBDEs in building materials, carpets, textiles, electronics, flooring, mattresses, foam furniture, and high temperature plastics like those used for TVs and computers. The most abundant type is decaBDE, which is ubiquitous in buildings and vehicles of all types.

What's the Danger?

California is the only state with a *furniture* flammability standard. To meet that standard, pentaBDE was added to furniture foam for more than 20 years. Citing environmental concerns, California banned penta and octa-PBDEs in 2003 – the first state to prohibit their use – but decaPBDE was not prohibited. The state maintains stringent flammability requirements for furniture and mattresses. (*Blum, 2008*)

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has categorized decaBDE as a possible human carcinogen and more than 100 peer-reviewed publications characterize PBDEs as toxic to neural, reproductive and thyroid function in animal studies. Studies published in 2008 indicate they can cause endocrine disruption in vitro, including one study that used a human breast cancer cell line. (*Mercado-Feliciano, 2008*)

No federal standards or guidelines have been set for PBDEs. The EPA acknowledges no "treatment" is currently available to remediate them from the environment. (*EPA factsheet*) The European Union prohibited use of pentaBDE and octaBDE in 2003. (*EU directive 2003/11/EC*)

For the complete article, which includes information about Northern California exposures and PBDEs in the home, as well as a list of citations, see our website at zerobreastcancer.org.