

Center for Health, Environment and Justice
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

December, 12, 2007

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SEARS/KMART IS LATEST TO PHASE OUT VINYL(PVC) PLASTIC
Minnesota Could Become Leader in New Green Economy

(Minneapolis) - Sparked by a national campaign of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ), together with health and environmental organizations including the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), the Sears Holdings (Sears and KMart) today announced plans to begin phasing out products and packaging containing vinyl, or polyvinyl chloride (PVC), plastic. PVC is a major source of human exposure to toxic lead, hormone-disrupting phthalates and dioxins.

CHEJ and IATP applaud Sears' willingness to recognize the harm caused by PVC throughout its life cycle as a product, from the harm to workers who make the products, to consumers who purchase them, and to communities near PVC manufacturing plants or near incinerators that burn PVC plastic in the solid waste stream.

Sears and Kmart's announcement follows PVC phase-outs announced earlier by local giant Target and Wal-Mart. The retail sector appears increasingly responsive to the trend in the global marketplace toward products designed for the environment, using cleaner technologies and reduced use of toxic chemicals, like PVC.

The heavy metal, lead, is commonly added as a stabilizer to PVC plastics, including those used in toys, vinyl lunchboxes and other consumer products. Recently, almost half of 1,200 toys (<http://healthytoys.org/home.php>) tested were found to be made out of PVC.

Over 90 percent of the billions of pounds of phthalates produced annually also are used in PVC products. Phthalate-containing children products are being phased out in the European Union and California following scientific evidence that the compounds disrupt hormone function in humans. Early-in-life phthalate exposures, such as during pregnancy, is implicated in impaired male sperm quality, reduced testosterone production and genital defects in boys, premature birth, early puberty in girls, and higher risks of asthma.

"When you mention Sears to someone, especially at Christmas time, it elicits memories of the Sears catalogue and toy shopping; Sears holds a place in America's collective memory," said Lois Gibbs, founder of the Center for Health, Environment & Justice. "It is fitting, right, and proper then, that Sears Holdings has been willing not only to recognize the potential dangers and harm caused by some of the products it currently sells, but has made the right decision to begin ridding its stores of this toxic PVC material."

Sears Holdings announced work to reduce and phase out PVC in its packaging and merchandise, including encouraging vendors to label their PVC-free merchandise. Sears also is working to identify safer, more sustainable and cost-effective alternatives to PVC and

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incorporate them into the design and manufacturing process for private label merchandise and packaging. To see Sears' PVC policy and plans go to: <http://www.searsholdings.com/>.

"Today, Sears joins Minnesota-based Target and other business leaders in embracing the global greening economy," said David Wallinga, M.D., of IATP and Healthy Legacy. "What these companies share is the realization that by designing for the environment, their businesses and products can help reduce fossil fuel use, promote better health, and create healthy, sustainable jobs." The Healthy Legacy campaign in Minnesota works for the production and use of everyday products without toxic chemicals and includes IATP, Minnesota Nurses Association, Learning Disabilities Association and Minnesota Parent Teachers Association.

In March 2006, CHEJ authored a letter signed by over 60 coalition members, asking Sears Holdings to sign a PVC-free pledge. Since receiving that letter, Sears Holdings representatives began holding good-faith discussions with CHEJ and other coalition members, resulting in today's major announcement. Sears Holdings was also contacted by a coalition of shareholders led by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who filed a resolution at the company raising concerns about PVC.

For in-depth details on the CHEJ PVC Campaign to prevent toxic harm in the retail industry go to: <http://www.besafenet.com/pvc>.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy.

The Center for Health, Environment & Justice exists to mentor the movement to build healthier communities by empowering people to prevent harm in as many ways, and for as many people, as possible. We believe this can happen when people and groups have the power to play an integral role in promoting human health and environmental integrity. CHEJ's role is to provide the tools, the direction, and the encouragement to these people and groups, so that they can build strong, healthy communities where they live, work, learn, shop, play and pray. Following her successful effort to prevent further harm for the people living in contaminated Love Canal, Lois Gibbs founded CHEJ in 1981 in order to continue mentoring others seeking to prevent harm. CHEJ provides mentoring assistance to communities, homeowners, families and individuals throughout the country. To date, CHEJ has assisted over 10,000 groups nationwide. Currently, CHEJ is mentoring community groups in Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina and Ohio. Details on CHEJ's efforts to help people and communities prevent harm can be found at <http://chej.org/>.