

Administration Proposes Ban on Toxic Chemical Trichloroethylene

Proposal aligns with President Biden's Cancer Moonshot by reducing toxic exposures known to cause cancer.

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Biden-Harris Administration Proposes Ban on Trichloroethylene to Protect Public from Toxic Chemical Known to Cause Serious Health Risks

Today [October 23], the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a proposal to ban all uses of [trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#), an extremely toxic chemical known to cause serious health risks including cancer, neurotoxicity, and reproductive toxicity. TCE is used in cleaning and furniture care products, degreasers, brake cleaners, and tire repair sealants, and a variety of safer alternatives are readily available for many uses.

This action, taken under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), would protect people from these health risks by banning the manufacture, processing, and distribution of TCE for all uses. EPA's proposed risk management rule would take effect in one year for consumer products and most commercial uses and would implement stringent worker protections on the limited remaining commercial and industrial uses that would be phased down over a longer period.

The proposal's expected exposure reductions to prevent cancer before it starts aligns with [President Biden's Cancer Moonshot](#), a whole-of-government approach to end cancer as we know it. The proposal also advances the President's historic commitment to environmental justice which seeks to address impacts of underinvestment in communities overburdened by legacy pollution and environmental hazards.

"Today, EPA is taking a vital step in our efforts to advance President Biden's Cancer Moonshot and protect people from cancer and other serious health risks," said EPA Deputy Administrator Janet McCabe. "The science is loud and clear on TCE. It is a dangerous toxic chemical and proposing to ban it will protect families, workers, and communities."

"For far too long, TCE has left a toxic legacy in communities across America. Today, EPA is taking a major step to protect people from exposure to this cancer-causing chemical," said Assistant Administrator for the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention Michal Freedhoff. "Today's proposal to end these unsafe, unrestricted uses of TCE will prevent future contamination to land

and drinking water and deliver the chemical safety protections this nation deserves.”

“We celebrate the EPA’s proposed ban on all uses of cancer-causing trichloroethylene, we remember the children such as Jimmy Anderson who were killed by corporate pollution, and we dedicate ourselves to cleaning up the air, water, and soil in communities everywhere,” said Senator Ed Markey. “Since Anne and I met in 1980, we have been partners in the effort to clean up Woburn, to get justice for her son, and to save other families from seeing their children fall sick as a result of contamination. Thanks to the advocacy of Anne Anderson and the action of the EPA, the era of corporations using communities like Woburn as dumping grounds for toxic TCE is over.”

EPA’s proposed risk management rule would prohibit most uses of TCE within one year, including TCE manufacture and processing for most commercial and all consumer products. Within this one-year timeframe, most people who are likely be exposed to TCE would be protected, including workers in many sectors, all consumers, and many communities. For the majority of uses of TCE as a solvent, including consumer products, safer alternatives to TCE are readily available. For limited uses of TCE, such as critical Federal Agency uses, battery separators used to make electric vehicle batteries, and the manufacture of certain refrigerants that are being phased down nationally while industry transitions to more climate-friendly refrigerants, the proposal would provide a longer transition period while requiring stringent worker protections to reduce exposures in the near-term.

Further, to support cleanup activities at sites of past TCE contamination (e.g., Superfund sites), EPA is proposing to allow for essential lab use and proper disposal of TCE wastewater to continue for 50 years, also subject to workplace protections.

EPA will accept public comments on the proposed rule for TCE for 45 days following publication in the Federal Register via docket EPA-HQ-OPPT-2020-0642 at www.regulations.gov.

EPA will also host a public webinar targeted to employers and workers, but useful for anyone looking for an overview of the proposed regulatory action. The date, time and registration information will be announced soon.

Background

TCE is a solvent used in cleaning and furniture care products, degreasers, and for automotive care such as tire repair and brake cleaners. Commercially, it is also used for vapor degreasing items such as metal parts used in aircraft or other machinery, as an intermediate in the manufacturing of certain refrigerants that are already being phased down nationally, and in the production of battery separators used in electric vehicles and other transportation, security, and defense systems.

For decades, communities have suffered from adverse health effects due to TCE contamination. TCE is commonly found at Superfund sites as a contaminant in soil and groundwater. EPA has worked extensively to clean up TCE contamination, but if rules like the one EPA is proposing today

under the reformed 2016 TSCA had been in place decades ago, many of these communities might not have been subjected to harmful TCE exposure in the first place.

EPA found that TCE causes liver cancer, kidney cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. It also causes damage to the central nervous system, liver, kidneys, immune system, reproductive organs, and is dangerous for fetal development. These risks are present even at very small concentrations of TCE. EPA also found that people living near facilities where TCE is made and used are at higher risk for developing these health conditions.

[Learn more about the rule.](#)

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