

## **STOP CANCER WHERE IT STARTS**

A project of Breast Cancer Network NZ

# **REDUCING BREAST CANCER RISKS IN THE COMMUNITY - A RESOURCE FOR USE WITH LOCAL AND REGIONAL COUNCILS**

We are pleased to introduce this resource for the Stop Cancer Where it Starts project in local communities. The information in this leaflet will help you decide if you would like to take the project to your local or regional councils. BCN would be pleased to hear from you if you decide to go ahead. We can supply further background material for you and your council.

### **The causes of breast cancer need to be addressed**

If the causes of breast cancer are not addressed the incidence of the disease will continue to rise, resulting in the next generations having a higher risk than our own. Science and the medical profession have made significant advances in breast cancer diagnosis, research and treatment, but have given little guidance about breast cancer prevention.

There is general acknowledgement that lifestyle (eg drinking, diet and exercise) can influence risk. There is also growing recognition of environmental risks, where evidence to date is highly suggestive, if not yet conclusive. To reduce risk from synthetic environmental chemicals the precautionary approach is needed. If something is strongly suspected of causing harm, it is best to avoid it. We can't easily protect ourselves from such chemicals when they are used widely in the community and in food production. Local, regional and central government must be involved.

Toxic synthetic chemicals can affect breast cells in many ways. In animal experiments with high doses some chemicals trigger cancers to start, others stimulate existing cancer cells to grow, others affect the surrounding cellular environment. Some suppress the immune system. Extremely small amounts of hormone-like chemicals have been shown to cause changes in the foetus that increase the risk of breast cancer. Rapidly growing breast cells are very vulnerable to environmental impact, so the foetus, young children and adolescents are more susceptible.

### **Stop Cancer Where it Starts**

Breast cancer groups in the USA have successfully campaigned with local councils to get resolutions and action plans passed. The focus has been on reducing harmful environmental chemicals and health education. Councils are in a good position to pass bylaws and resolutions, clean up the environment and educate the public and business sectors about the impact of chemicals on cancer risk.

More than 80 Canadian cities have adopted the precautionary principle by banning cosmetic or non-essential use of weed-killers on areas such as private property. In both Canada and USA steps have been taken by central or state governments to ban plastics made with endocrine-disrupting chemicals in baby bottles and children's toys.

## **Breast cancer in New Zealand**

- Most common female cancer
- Incidence still increasing - now 2300 new cases per year
- More breast cancer than 3<sup>rd</sup> world and Asian countries
- Less than 10% caused by inherited genes
- Influenced by hormones and hormone-disrupting chemicals
- Lifestyle factors contribute
- Many cases attributed to "the environment"

## **Two concepts of environment**

Firstly, the cellular environment in our body is influenced by factors such as exercise, nutrition, alcohol, what is absorbed through the skin, radiation, hormones and genetics. (BCN will be pleased to send you our two lifestyle leaflets on request)

Secondly, the wider environment includes the home, school, workplace, our sports venues, streets, vehicles, buildings, industries, farms, beaches and waterways. Chemicals and plastics are a common factor in pollution of the wider environment. Chemical influences on our health from these sources are largely beyond an individual's control BUT local, regional and central government can act to reduce chemical exposures.

## **Widespread chemical exposure**

- 85,000 synthetic chemicals in use in USA, many used in NZ
- Some chemicals act like hormones in the body
- Full safety tests have never been done for many chemicals
- Animal studies show chemicals can make breast cancer cells grow
- Chemicals are stored in fatty tissue such as breast tissue
- Breast milk world-wide is contaminated - up to 116 chemicals in one USA study (In spite of this, breastfeeding is still best for baby and mother)
- Harmful chemicals found in house dust (USA).
- Some areas of NZ have contaminated ground water
- More testing is needed to monitor the NZ environment
- Some building materials and wood treatments can be harmful
- Many workplaces are regularly sprayed for insect control

## **HOW TO BEGIN**

### **Learn about what local Councils do**

- Local councils make decisions about weed control and use of chemical sprays and how they are notified to the public.
- They should provide safe disposal for hazardous materials and educate about risk.
- Councils are involved in health through sport and recreation, occupational safety and health practices, and in bylaws relating to clean air - such as back-yard fires.
- Councils can educate on subjects relevant to the health of the community and encourage people to walk or cycle by providing appropriate facilities. They can take action when local problems develop, such as contaminated soil or sewage problems.
- Councils run fleets of vehicles - they should select fuel-efficient models, keep them well-tuned and promote the benefits of good car maintenance to the public.
- They can take a case to the regional body or central government if they are convinced of a need for wider action.

### **Read the relevant sections of the District Plan**

You will need to read parts of your local District Plan, and learn about existing council policies and activities. Your local library should have the Plan and be able to assist you. Some councils are doing quite a lot to reduce pollution in the environment but there is usually room for doing better. Find out when the District Plan is to be reviewed as public comment will be called for at such a time.

### **Get in touch with local environmental groups**

You may learn about specific situations in your area from groups such as Greenpeace, Forest and Bird Assn, Soil and Health Assn, Pesticides Action Network and others. They may offer support as well as information and guidance learned from their experience with council.

### **Phone the Council**

Find out which departments deal with environmental matters and public health. It will help you to make contact with key people in these sections and if possible enlist their aid. Ask for information about council spraying programmes in parks, streets (grass verges and road edges), waterways and playing fields. What is used in each situation, and how often? How is the public advised and protected? What safer alternatives has Council investigated, if any? Find out which Council meetings the public can attend and the process you should use for bringing an issue to Council's attention.

### **Find someone to help you**

It is best to find at least one other local person to help you with the project and accompany you to the Council, to help ensure your effectiveness and provide moral support.

## **Set the goals, and make a plan**

Once you have an understanding of how your council operates, make a plan. Set just one or two goals rather than tackling lots of things at once. Familiarise yourself with information from BCN, your library and reliable websites. You should make notes for yourself listing your most important points if you decide to speak out at a public council meeting, and it's a good idea to provide Councillors with some written material. Please contact BCN for help with resources for this purpose. If you are asked a question you can't answer, offer to find out the information and bring it to the next meeting.

## **Regional Councils**

The steps are largely the same as for local councils, but the areas of jurisdiction are different. Among other responsibilities, regional bodies are responsible for clean water, the monitoring of air pollution, and regional parks.

## **LOCAL AND REGIONAL COUNCILS CAN BE ASKED TO REDUCE CANCER-CAUSING CHEMICALS IN THE ENVIRONMENT:**

- Councils can adopt a "precautionary approach" to policy for chemical use
- Ban non-essential "cosmetic" use of chemical weed killers, as in Canadian cities
- Use the safest methods to kill weeds and pests rather than the cheapest
- If pesticides must be used, choose the least toxic options.
- Ensure contracted chemical operators are fully trained and protected.
- Give public warnings if chemical sprays are used
- Close sprayed areas to the public
- Promote zero toxic waste including dioxins
- Provide safe disposal facility for hazardous materials
- Ban burning of garden rubbish and provide alternatives
- Promote vehicle tuning and maintain low emission vehicle fleets
- Promote a healthy lifestyle, especially regarding exercise, nutrition, smoking and alcohol
- Ensure water supply is free of toxic chemicals
- Monitor air pollution in buildings and streets and take action to improve quality
- Look into protection of staff and public when spraying buildings for insects
- Support reduced use of toxic building materials and encourage heat-efficient homes
- Lobby central government to reduce environmental chemicals

## **Will you join us on this project?**

For more information and resource materials

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