Obama Administration Calls For Chemical-Law Reform

DINA CAPPIELLO Associated Press Writer — September 30, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) — With more and more toxic chemicals turning up in people's bodies and the environment, the Obama administration asked Congress Tuesday to draft a tougher law for how the government regulates tens of thousands of chemicals.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson called the 32-year-old statute governing toxic substances a flawed tool for protecting the public from the more than 80,000 chemicals that have been introduced on the market. Those chemicals, which do not include pesticides or drugs, are used in everything from cell phones to plastic drinking-water bottles. Not all of them are still in use, experts said.

"The American people are looking to the government for assurance that chemicals have been assessed using the best available science and unacceptable risks haven't been ignored," Jackson said in a conference call with reporters before a formal announcement in San Francisco. "Unfortunately, the current law does not allow us to grant them that assurance."

Jackson said recent scares with lead in toys, dioxin in fish and phthalate esters — plastic-hardening chemicals used in intravenous bags, where they can enter a patient's blood stream — are making the public "understandably anxious and confused."

The Obama administration wants Congress to craft a law that will require chemical manufacturers to provide enough information so that the EPA can evaluate the risks, and to give the agency the authority to act against chemicals it determines to be dangerous.

In addition to asking Congress to enact a stronger law, Jackson also said the agency would immediately launch a review of six chemicals that have raised concerns.

Those substances include:

— Bisphenol A, or BPA, which is used in plastic beverage containers and, some evidence suggests, can effect the brain and behavior in fetuses, infants and children.

— Perfluorinated chemicals, used in nonstick cookware and in some waterproof clothing, will also be checked out because of some research linking them to

infertility in women.

Environmentalists applauded the EPA's action Tuesday, saying it was long overdue. Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., said he would introduce a bill incorporating the administration's suggestions.

"America's system for regulating toxic substances is broken," said Lautenberg. "Americans deserve to know that products they rely on...are safe and will not harm their families."

Under current law, chemical manufacturers are not required to develop new data on toxicity and exposure, which has led to chemicals being used in products that have not been adequately screened for safety.

When the EPA does have enough information to flag a chemical as dangerous, the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act, makes clamping down on its use difficult, Jackson said.

The agency to date has only taken action against five chemicals, and in one of those cases — asbestos — a federal appeals ruled that the EPA had not made a strong enough case or factored in the costs for phasing out its use.

Many of the reforms the administration has suggested largely mirror those advanced by the chemical manufacturing industry, which is concerned about a patchwork of regulations at the state and local level.

Cal Dooley, the president and chief executive of the American Chemistry Council, a trade group representing the majority of chemical manufacturers, said Tuesday that it was critical to modernize the law.

"We must harness the advances in science and technology...that puts safety of the American consumer first," he said.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/11/2013 - 3:49pm*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2009/09/obama-administration-calls-chemical-law-reform?qt-recent_content=0