State Bill Takes Aim at Chemicals Toxic to Kids

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GRANTS PASS, Ore. (AP) — A bill before the Legislature would set up a state database to track the use of 19 chemicals in manufactured products shown to be harmful to children, and work with manufacturers to phase out use of the chemicals over five years.

The bi-partisan bill is patterned after a law in Washington state. Based on the experience of past failures to ban harmful chemicals from everyday items like baby bottles and food cans, environmentalists and child advocates also are supporting the measure as a longer, market-driven view.

"We tried to use the exact same law passed by Washington, which had a lot of bipartisan support, to make it as easy as possible for companies," said Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer, D-Portland, the principal sponsor of the bill. "We want strong economy activity, but not at the expense of the population."

By piggybacking on Washington state's law, Oregon would build market pressure, she added.

Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Portland-Beaverton, a co-sponsor, said, "It's always better when manufacturers make choices because of public demand That's what happened with BPA."

BPA — or bisphenol-A - is a hardener used in plastics, from baby bottles to music CDs. Research had shown it posed a threat to brain and reproductive system development in babies and young children. Though Canada, several states and Multnomah County banned its use in various products, the Oregon Legislature would not, most recently in 2011. Opponents said a ban would pose problems for manufacturers, particularly of food cans, are lined with plastic.

"We took from the Legislature that they didn't want to single out one chemical," said Andrea Durbin, director of the Oregon Environmental Council, which pushed the BPA ban that failed in 2011. "They wanted to take a more comprehensive scientific approach. This does that. We borrow what Washington state has done."

The list of chemicals is drawn from the intersection of Washington state and Oregon's lists of chemicals of concern. They have been linked to cancer, heart disease, and developmental and behavioral disorders. The list includes well-known toxins like mercury and cadmium, which are found in batteries, as well as fire retardants, solvents, substances used in cosmetics. The lsit also includes formaldehyde, which is used to make clothing wrinkle-free, and benzene, which is present in cigarette smoke, vehicle exhaust and synthetic rubber.

The list would be posted online by the Oregon Health Authority. Companies with

gross sales of more than $5 million would have to report the presence of the chemicals in their products, as well as how many are sold in Oregon. After five years, they would have to quit using the chemical, or apply for a waiver because they don't have a good substitute, or they have proof it is not toxic.

Sponsors are waiting for a hearing on Wednesday in Salem to see if the chemical industries turns out in opposition, as it has for past efforts to ban chemicals.

The American Chemical Council, which has opposed past attempts to ban toxic chemicals, did not respond to requests for comment via email and telephone.

"Think about it," said Keny-Guyer. "What would the opposition be? With these big companies, we're just asking you to phase out the chemicals. You don't want to do that? Chemicals that have been shown to be harmful to children? Really?"

Lawmakers who opposed the BPA ban in 2011 did not immediately respond to emails for comment.

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The measure is House Bill 3162

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