

Sharon Rolenc, *Insight News*

U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum (MN-4) and two congressional colleagues are calling on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ban the chemical triclosan, a common ingredient in antibacterial soaps, shampoos, household cleaners and even such products as socks and toys. They've asked for a full review of triclosan to be submitted to Congress by April. The co-sponsors are US Reps. Louise Slaughter of New York and Raul Grijalva of Arizona.

Dr. David Wallinga, director of the food and health program at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, says that for years the scientific community has expressed concern over triclosan contributing to the creation of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, so-called "superbugs."

"Bacteria - bugs around us - are actually quite smart, and exposing them to antibacterials or antimicrobial chemicals helps to make them smarter. So putting an antibacterial or antimicrobial like Triclosan out there in the environment and our waterways unnecessarily is just not a good idea at all," said Wallinga.

One of the other big concerns about triclosan is that its chemical structure closely resembles dioxin, a highly-toxic substance known to cause cancer.

Wallinga says more and more research shows that triclosan, like dioxin, is an "endocrine inhibitor" or "disruptor"; meaning it can mimic and block or change regular hormone function.

"Hormones are sort of like the messengers within our bodies; they tell different parts of the body what to do and they coordinate all the different organ systems of the body so they work well together," said Wallinga.

Exposure to endocrine disruptors is particularly concerning during fetal development and for small children.

Wallinga says household products containing triclosan offer no more effective protections than those without.

"We're putting it in a whole slew of consumer products for reasons that are absolutely unnecessary. There's absolutely no reason to use triclosan in most of these products. There's no evidence that triclosan in soaps work any better than just plain soap and water," said Wallinga.

Wallinga added: "We've played public health roulette far too long" by allowing persistent chemicals like triclosan into consumer products without ensuring their safety for humans or the environment.