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Target Will Reduce PVC Use

Initiative Detailed Amid Pressure From Groups

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By SARA SCHAEFER MUÑOZ

Amid pressure from consumer, health and environmental groups, Target Corp. said it is reducing its use of the plastic polyvinyl chloride in packaging and children's products, such as lunch boxes and bibs.



Anti-PVC protesters in front of Target stores

Polyvinyl chloride, or PVC, is a cheap, durable form of plastic commonly used in building materials such as pipes, as well as consumer products such as toys, electronics and shower curtains. Packaging made of PVC includes the soft plastic zipper bags that hold sheets and the hard plastic containers for small electronics.

PVC is made with vinyl chloride, which the Environmental Protection Agency has classified as a human carcinogen. People can be exposed to the chemical through discharge of gases from factories, groundwater and occupational exposure, the agency said.

A concern with vinyl products is they may contain lead, which can pose a problem if the plastic



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deteriorates or children put the products in their mouths. Earlier this year, the Consumer Product Safety Commission warned consumers that old and peeling vinyl baby bibs could expose children to unsafe levels of lead. Phthalates, chemicals often added to PVC to increase flexibility, have been linked to reproductive development problems in males. The European Union and California have banned the sale of toys containing phthalates. The California ban will go into effect in 2009.

A spokeswoman for Target said efforts to reduce the use of PVC predated actions by health, consumer and environmental groups, which protested and handed out fliers in front of Target stores throughout the year. Last month, the company sent a response to the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, a nonprofit organization in Falls Church, Va., which led the anti-PVC campaign, detailing a number of recent anti-PVC initiatives. They include the development of an action plan to identify PVC alternatives, efforts to make the company's place mat and table linen categories nearly phthalate-free by spring, and efforts to find PVC alternatives in most toy categories for fall 2008. The company said all children's lunch boxes and utensils in Target's own brands are now PVC-free.

Target said it is using alternatives such as recycled paperboard or corrugated packaging, as well as ethylene vinyl acetate, another type of plastic, for products like shower curtains. In some products, the company said, it will use phthalate-free PVC.

Ethylene vinyl acetate is preferable for the environment because it doesn't create harmful dioxins when produced or destroyed, and doesn't contain lead or phthalates, said Michael Schade, PVC campaign coordinator with the Center for Health, Environment and Justice. However, he said his group advocates bio-based plastics, such as those made from corn. There are no human studies on the possible cancer-causing properties of vinyl acetate, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

Target is among several large companies, including Wal-Mart Stores Inc., that have agreed to reduce the use of PVC in packaging and products in recent years.

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Printed in The Wall Street Journal, page D2

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