



Expert warns of product chemicals

People are exposed to a variety of everyday toxic substances and the effects are largely unknown, a researcher tells a KU audience.

By Darrin Youker
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Most people know the harm caused by exposure to lead and mercury, and how to avoid coming into contact with those substances.

But many aren't aware of the chemicals in everyday products such as food containers, frying pans and lipstick.

In many cases, state and federal regulators also are unaware of the problems these products cause on the human body.

That was the message Dr. Steven Gilbert, a national toxicology expert, brought to Kutz-

town University during a lecture Wednesday night.

"We are exposed to a whole array of chemicals before we are even born," Gilbert told a group of about 50 students and staff.

He spoke at Kutztown as part of an ongoing lecture series hosted by the Pennsylvania Institute for the Advancement of Children's Environmental Health.

Gilbert, who lives in Seattle, has done research on how small doses of toxic substances, such as lead, can cause permanent damage in children.

Each year, U.S. manufacturers produce more than 1 mil-

lion pounds of 3,000 different chemicals, Gilbert said. Of those, 78 percent have not been tested to determine long-term health effects on humans, he said.

Industries should be required to test chemicals before they are put in products, Gilbert said.

For instance, he said, harmful chemicals including lead are found in makeup and lipstick. However, there is no requirement for cosmetics manufacturers to tell consumers what is in their products, he said.

Other countries have started to eliminate the use of nonstick cookware because chemicals in those products can contaminate food during cooking, Gilbert said. Cast iron cooking is a far safer alternative, he said.

State health departments

are starting to pay closer attention to the chemical makeup of certain plastics used in baby bottles and other products, Gilbert said. Research has shown those chemicals can cause hormonal changes in developing children, he said.

"We need to think of our future and that of our children," he said. "Our current policies are not working."

Dr. Chris Sacchi, a Kutztown environmental sciences professor, said some students are paying attention to the unseen chemicals in common household products. Some have done away with plastic bottles and replaced them with stainless steel ones, he said.

"There is a certain level of awareness," Sacchi said.

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