



Product Testing for the People: Pitfalls, Persistence, and Progress in Transforming Dollar Stores



The Campaign for Healthier Solutions





The **Campaign for Healthier Solutions (CHS)** is urging the nation's largest dollar stores to implement corporate policies to phase out harmful chemicals in the products they sell, mandate the use of safer chemicals, and stock healthy, locally-grown foods in stores. CHS is a community-led, collaborative project of the Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform and Coming Clean that includes farmworker advocates, environmental justice communities and environmental health organizations. Together, we are demanding that dollar stores proactively protect the health and wellbeing of the communities in which they operate. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#), and learn more at <https://nontoxicdollarstores.org>

[Coming Clean](#) is a nonprofit environmental health collaborative working to transform the chemical industry so it is no longer a source of harm, and to secure systemic changes that allow a safe chemical and clean energy economy to flourish. Our members are organizations and technical experts — including grassroots activists, community leaders, scientists, health professionals, business leaders, lawyers, and farmworker advocates — committed to principled collaboration to advance a nontoxic, sustainable, and just world for all. Learn more at <https://comingcleaninc.org/>

The [Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform](#) (EJHA) is a national network of grassroots Environmental and Economic Justice organizations and advocates in communities that are disproportionately impacted by toxic chemicals from legacy contamination, ongoing exposure to polluting facilities and health-harming chemicals in household products. EJHA supports a just transition towards safer chemicals and a pollution-free economy that leaves no community or worker behind. Learn more at <https://ej4all.org/>

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Campaign for Healthier Solutions Grassroots Anchor Groups

- [Los Jardines Institute](#) – Albuquerque, New Mexico
- [Líderes Campesinas](#) – Oxnard, California
- [Harambee House](#) – Savannah, Georgia

- [Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services \(TEJAS\)](#) - Houston, Texas

Affiliates And Partner Organizations

- [Clean Production Action](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Association of America's Healthy Children's Project](#)

Research partners

Clearya is an AI-powered analytics platform that makes safer chemistry more accessible and actionable across the value chain. With tools like Clearya Insights and Clearya Survey, it enables companies and their investors, regulators, researchers, and advocates to uncover toxic chemical risks, benchmark products and brands, and identify safer alternatives in use. By transforming fragmented data into realtime insights, Clearya supports transparency, informed decision-making, and collaboration toward safer products and healthier communities and workplaces. www.clearya.com/insights

The Ecology Center campaigns for healthy people and a healthy planet, focusing on environmental health, climate action and clean equitable energy, environmental Education, and Zero Waste. The Healthy Stuff Lab is a scientific research project of the [Ecology Center](#). Their team of scientists conducts research and tests consumer products, air, soil, water, fish, food and more for toxic chemicals.

[Material Research L3C](#) is a low profit research company that provides open-access data that serves journalists, communities, researchers and campaigners worldwide in pursuit of environmental justice and human rights. The organization engages in deep and well-rounded investigation, research, and tool building with proficiency in geospatial mapping, chemical industries, corporate research, trade analysis, and supply chain investigations.

Disclaimer

The information and recommendations presented in this report do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the research partners or reviewers. The information included in this report does not provide a measure of health risk or chemical exposure associated with any individual product, or any individual element or related chemical.



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Executive Summary

In 2024, the Campaign for Healthier Solutions invited community members across the country to purchase everyday products from Dollar Tree, Dollar General and Family Dollar and submit them to the Ecology Center lab to be screened for chemicals of concern. Campaign supporters also downloaded the Clearya app and scanned dollar store product labels for the presence of potential chemicals of concern in early 2025, later verifying the results via the Clearya Insights platform. This community-driven product screening project is meant to hold dollar stores accountable to the public commitments they have made to remove priority chemicals from their supply chain, and urge them to expand their restricted substances lists and seek safer solutions.

Our findings show that dollar stores continue to profit from the sale of products containing chemicals of concern.

- **46** out of **130** products purchased at major dollar stores in the personal care, beauty, baby, and cleaning sections were shown by the Clearya Insights platform to contain chemicals of concern, and 10 of these products contained chemicals prohibited or restricted in Europe or Canada;
- Separate lab testing of an additional **217** products detected lead in five children’s electronics and three common holiday-themed items purchased at dollar stores, showing that Dollar Tree and Dollar General’s existing policies to restrict lead must be strengthened;
- One quarter of these **217** products contained high levels of chlorine, indicating that they are made from the “poison plastic” PVC. In 2021, Dollar Tree publicly committed to prohibit PVC plastic in private-brand children’s products and encourage its suppliers to restrict the use of PVC in children’s products by 2024. We purchased **11** children’s products at Dollar Tree/ Family Dollar and 10 children’s products at Dollar General that were confirmed to be made with PVC;
- Receipts at both Dollar Tree and Dollar General were found to contain bisphenol S (BPS), a compound linked to reproductive harms that was recently banned by the [state of Washington](#).

There was also some good news. Our [previous testing](#) revealed the presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in microwavable popcorn packaging sold at dollar stores. But all the popcorn brands we purchased for testing in 2025 contained no detectable levels of fluorine - indicating that they are PFAS free. This speaks to the power of advocacy and consumer engagement.

Families shouldn’t have to read the fine print of company chemical policies to know if products on the shelves are safe. Dollar stores can and must do better. The Campaign for Healthier Solutions calls on dollar stores to restrict toxic chemicals in all the products available at their stores and ensure the substitutes are safer for consumers, communities, and workers.



Introduction

For more than ten years, the Campaign for Healthier Solutions has pressured dollar stores to remove harmful chemicals and products from their store shelves, and stock safer products and healthy foods. Removing harmful chemicals and plastics not only makes good business sense, but also protects people and the environment. Being able to buy products free of hazardous chemicals is particularly important for communities who rely on dollar stores for their food and household goods. [Data from 2018](#) shows that almost one-half (about 13,000) of the almost 27,000 dollar stores owned by the largest U.S. chains were located within three miles of a high-risk industrial facility. ¹Communities living in proximity to these facilities face increased risk from toxic chemicals, and any additional exposure from harmful chemicals in products used in the home will only add to this burden. Therefore, it is all the more important for dollar stores to take responsibility and ensure no hazardous chemicals are contained in the products they sell.

Because our chemical regulatory system is slow to act, and is not protective, retailer responsibility for hazardous chemicals in products is crucial. One reason that dangerous chemicals can enter the market is because the onus is put on regulators to prove harm, not on the manufacturer or distributor to prove chemical safety. For example, the federal Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) is so weak that only a handful of chemicals have ever been restricted, while tens of thousands have been exempted or fasttracked for approval. Now even this process is under attack by President Trump's Administration. [Legislation introduced in Congress](#) would prohibit the Environmental Protection Agency from using any of the IRIS' database of hundreds of chemical assessments.² The Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) is an independent, nonpartisan basis for the rules, regulations and permits that limit our exposure to toxic chemicals. Its scientists transparently assess the toxicity of chemicals, and estimate the amount of each that triggers cancer and other health effects. If it becomes law, the "No IRIS Act of 2025," would essentially bar the agency from carrying out its mission, some experts say. [Lawyers note](#) that companies could even use the law to fight the enforcement of environmental rules that have long been on the books, or even the permits that limit their toxic emissions.³ Other efforts by the Trump Administration include [halting the replacement of lead pipes](#) over the next 13 years and a lowering of the limit on lead in water; a reversal of a ban on Trichloroethylene (TCE), a compound that is among the most toxic and common water pollutants⁴; and [stalling a plan to set new limits on PFAS](#) discharges into drinking water.⁵ Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also called 'forever chemicals', are persistent, toxic chemicals that are present in [97% of Americans](#). As of March 2025, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is reviewing [31 health and safety rules for possible rollbacks](#).⁶

In this time of regulatory and scientific rollback, it is crucial that dollar stores go beyond the bare minimum, reduce the use of harmful chemicals in products and packaging they sell, actively seek safer solutions, and clearly share information with the public. Some

companies are already measuring their "chemical footprint" – the amount of hazardous chemicals in the products they sell. And they are transparently reporting on progress to reduce their chemical footprint while instructing their suppliers to find and use safer substitutes. Dollar General, Dollar Tree, and Family Dollar continue to fall behind these competitors.

[Walmart](#), for example, declared in 2017 that it would measure the use of priority chemicals in cosmetics, personal care products, household cleaners, and formulated baby care products in both private-label and brand-name products sold by Walmart and Sam's Club in the U.S. Their list of priority chemicals covers more than 2,700 inherently toxic chemicals. The company set a goal to reduce the chemical footprint of formulated products by 10% within five years. In 2022, the company announced they had surpassed this goal. Walmart worked with suppliers to reduce the use of priority chemicals in these products by 17% over three years, from its 2017 baseline through 2020 -- a reduction of 37 million pounds of hazardous chemicals.⁷

Ten years ago, [we wrote](#) that discount retailers were falling behind on safer chemicals use and that dollar stores needed broad corporate policies to identify and phase out harmful chemicals across supply chains.⁸ Unfortunately, only very slow and minimal progress has been made by dollar stores, even though financial resources exist to implement stronger chemicals policy. In 2024, [Dollar Tree](#) annual revenue was \$30.6 billion, an 8% increase from 2023⁹; while [Dollar General](#) achieved a record \$40.6 billion in sales for fiscal year 2024, a 5% increase from 2023.¹⁰

Toxic-Free Future routinely reviews dollar stores, along with a larger number of retailers, in [The Retailer Report Card](#). This project, first launched in 2016, is the most comprehensive assessment of the largest retailers' corporate policies and implementation programs addressing hazardous chemicals and plastics in the United States and Canada. The 2024 Retailer Report Card found that Dollar General and Dollar Tree have not substantially improved in recent years. Although Dollar General did go from an F to a D+, this is still a very poor grade, and progress has been slow over the five years they have been assessed. In comparison, in 2024 four retailers received the highest grades: Apple (A), Sephora (A-), Target (A-), and Walmart (A-).

Dollar General's score slightly increased from an F to a D+ with a ranking of 25 out of 50 retailers.¹¹

2017	2018	2019	2021	2024
F	F	D	C-	D+



Dollar Tree’s score of D remained relatively constant over seven years, with a current ranking of 27 out of 50 retailers.¹²

2017	2018	2019	2021	2024
D	D	D+	C+	D

What We Found in Select Products from Dollar General and Dollar Tree/Family Dollar

In 2024 and early 2025, the Campaign for Healthier Solutions mobilized community members from California to Maine to purchase or scan items at their local Dollar General, Dollar Tree, and Family Dollar (a subsidiary of Dollar Tree during this time). These products were then screened to determine if they contained chemicals or plastics of concern. Even though we only screened for a limited set of chemicals, and our sample size was small compared to the volume of products sold in dollar stores, we found many products containing chemicals of concern.

CHS employed three different methods of evaluating and testing products for this report:

- 1. 130 products were screened for the presence of chemicals of concern using the [Clearya Insights](#) Analytics Platform.¹³ Clearya Insights can enable benchmarking of product safety across brands and categories, providing retailers and manufacturers with actionable data on safer ingredients and market-proven alternatives. This constructive, data-driven approach is intended as a resource for all stakeholders—regulators, advocates, and industry alike—to promote informed decision-making, continuous improvement, and safer, healthier products.
- 2. Ecology Center researchers used X-ray fluorescence (XRF) to screen for potentially hazardous chemicals in 217 products. XRF technology is widely used by both product manufacturers and government regulators, including by the Consumer Product Safety Council (CPSC), to test consumer products for hazardous metals and other chemical elements. Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) was used to screen a subset of products for the presence of vinyl (polyvinyl chloride, PVC) plastic. FTIR was also used to identify bisphenol S (BPS) color developers in store receipts. FTIR is a technique that uses infrared light to identify the molecular composition of a sample.
- 3. A separate test for PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) in microwaveable popcorn bags of four national popcorn brands sold at dollar stores was conducted by Galbraith Laboratories, Inc. The lab tested for total fluorine and fluoride using a threshold of 10 parts per million (ppm).

1. Clearya Scan Results: Chemicals of concern are found in beauty, personal care and cleaning products.

Campaign for Healthier Solutions supporters visited several Dollar General, Dollar Tree, and Family Dollar locations in February 2025, and using the [Clearya mobile app](#), screened a variety of personal care, cosmetic, and cleaning products, including products marketed to infants and children. These products were then subsequently analyzed using Clearya Survey, a streamlined product-label collection and analysis tool within the [Clearya Insights](#) platform. This analysis documented a troubling number of products with ingredients linked to serious health concerns as defined by authoritative chemical hazardlists (referred to in this report as chemicals of concern).

Summary

- 46 products screened contained chemicals of concern;
- 10 of these products contained an ingredient prohibited or restricted in some jurisdiction (i.e. Canada, European Union (EU), etc.);
- We scanned personal care and beauty products that mothers might purchase for themselves or their children, as well as common household cleaning products;
- Several private brand products contained chemicals of concern.

Dollar General

- 24 products screened contained chemicals of concern;
- 9 of these products contained an ingredient prohibited or restricted in Canada or the European Union (EU);
- 9 Dollar General private label products contained chemicals of concern: 3 of these products were from a brand called Studio Selection; 4 of these products were from a brand called True Living; 2 of these products were from a brand called Root-to-End.

Family Dollar

- 7 products screened contained chemicals of concern;
- 1 of these products contained an ingredient prohibited or restricted in Canada or the EU;
- 3 Family Dollar private label products contained chemicals of concern: 2 products were from a brand called Homeline; 1 product was from a brand called Kidgets.






We found the following numbers of products with ingredients authoritatively linked to these hazard traits:

Reproductive toxicity	5 products
Carcinogenicity	23 products
Developmental toxicity	2 products
Mutagen	22 products
Endocrine disruption/toxicity	20 products
Formaldehyde releaser	5 products

Consumers want safe products, particularly for cosmetics, personal care and cleaning. Many people assume that disclosing chemical ingredients in products and packaging is an assurance of no harm. But chemical hazard information is continuously updated internationally, and retailers need to screen their product ingredients against the most up to date authoritative information.

 **Safe shopping tip:**
Download the free **Clearya app*** on your phone and scan cosmetic and cleaning items before you buy them to make sure they are free of harmful ingredients.

*Although the Clearya app is very useful, it is not intended for all products. We encourage shoppers to use this tool, even though it should not be people’s responsibility to check for ingredient safety. Instead, companies, including dollar stores, need to make sure everything they sell is as safe as possible.

Product Highlights



Pinkfong Baby Shark Baby Lotion purchased at Dollar Tree

Contains the **formaldehyde-releaser** diazolidinyl urea. Formaldehyde is known to cause cancer.¹⁴



Sprout Watermelon Scent bath Slime Soap purchased at Dollar Tree

Contains the **formaldehyde-releaser** DMDM hydantoin. The Washington State Department of Ecology has proposed [a ban](#) on formaldehyde-releasing chemicals in cosmetics.

Formaldehyde and chemicals that release formaldehyde are commonly found in cosmetic products like nail polish, eyelash glue, shampoo, and hair gel. People can be exposed to these chemicals every time they use these products – and formaldehyde is known to cause cancer in humans. Washington State proposes to ban intentionally added formaldehyde releasers effective January 1, 2027.¹⁵

“Formaldehyde-releasing chemicals are a special concern because they’re in many cosmetic products routinely used by women, people of color and cosmetologists, increasing their exposure to harmful chemicals”, Shari Franjevic, Department of Ecology, Washington State said in a [press release](#).



Softsoap Exfoliating Body Wash purchased at Dollar General

Contains galaxolide, isoeugenol, an **undisclosed fragrance**

Four dollar store products contained undisclosed **fragrance ingredients** that are required to be reported to the **California Safe Cosmetics Program** (CSCP) under California’s Cosmetic Fragrance and Flavor Ingredient Right to Know Act of 2020. California is the only state that requires companies to report harmful ingredients used in cosmetics. The primary purpose of the (CSCP) is to make this information available to the public.

 **Safe Shopping Tip:**
Avoid products that list “fragrance” on the label, especially if you are pregnant or have young children in the house - these products may be hiding health-harming chemicals.



Studio Selection Lovely Glow Daily Moisturizer Lotion purchased at Dollar General

Contains **Lilial** (butylphenyl methylpropional); and contains **lyral** (hydroxyisohexyl 3-cyclohexene carboxaldehyde). Lilial and lyral are prohibited in cosmetics in the EU16. Lilial can adversely affect fertility and fetal development.¹⁷

Contains Butylated hydroxytoluene, also known as BHT, which is an endocrine disruptor¹⁸.



Studio Selection Deep Cleansing Skin Cream purchased at Dollar General

Contains **phenol**, which is prohibited in cosmetics in both Canada and the EU.¹⁹ Phenol has been identified as a mutagen which can increase risk of cancer and can harm the thyroid and liver.²⁰



Simply U Moisture Care: Cooling Hydration Body Lotion purchased at Dollar General

Contains **lilial**, which is prohibited in cosmetics in the EU.²¹ Lilial can adversely affect fertility and fetal development.²²



Root to End Xtra Hold Hairspray purchased at Dollar General

Contains **Cyclotetrasiloxane (D4)**, which is prohibited in cosmetics in the EU.²³ cyclotetrasiloxane (D4) (Octamethylcyclotetrasiloxane) has been linked to reproductive harm and endocrine disruption.²⁴



Tuff Stuff Multi-Purpose Foam Cleaner purchased at Dollar General

Contains **ethylene glycol monomethyl ether**, which has been identified as a developmental toxicant and a reproductive toxicant.²⁵ Also contains **isobutane**, a fossil fuel product that can contain 1,3-butadiene, a known carcinogen.^{26 27}



True Living Furniture Polish purchased at Dollar General

Contains **naphtha**, a fossil fuel product that is hazardous to breathe, and which can contain impurities such as benzene, a known carcinogen.²⁸ This product also contains **butane**, a fossil fuel product that can contain 1,3-butadiene, a known carcinogen.^{29 30}



Moth Shield Moth Balls Original Scented purchased at Dollar General

Contains **1,4-dichlorobenzene**, which is hazardous to breathe and has been linked to cancer.³¹



Bronner Bros Double Strength Super Gro purchased at Family Dollar

Contains the endocrine disrupting chemical **cholecalciferol**³², which is prohibited in cosmetics in the EU.³³

Recommendations for Dollar General and Dollar Tree/Family Dollar

Adopt and publish a bold safer chemicals policy, with senior management level commitment, that commits to transparently eliminating the use of all chemicals and plastics of high concern and implementing safer solutions. Dollar General and Dollar Tree/Family Dollar should also measure and disclose their chemical footprint and set clear, ambitious public goals with timelines and quantifiable metrics to eliminate chemical classes and plastics of high concern. To avoid replacing hazardous chemicals with regrettable substitutes, dollar stores must adopt a definition of “safer alternative” in their chemicals policy and communicate this to suppliers. Substitutes for hazardous chemicals can be assessed using tools like GreenScreen® for Safer Chemicals, ChemFORWARD, and Clearya Insights.

In particular, Dollar General, Dollar Tree/Family Dollar should:

1. Immediately expand their chemical policies to cover all products for which public ingredient disclosure is already available (such as beauty and personal care products, and cleaning products);
2. Immediately expand their restricted substances lists by adopting the [Ban the Bad Priority list](#) and Chemical Footprint Project’s comprehensive [Chemicals of High Concern Reference List \(CoHC\)](#);
3. Within 12 months, and annually thereafter, report on the amount of CoHC that were eliminated in these products and the measures used to ensure substitutes are safer;
4. Within this time period, work with suppliers to obtain full material disclosure for all remaining product categories and publicly commit to eliminate the use of CoHC and plastics of high concern in all product categories within 3 years with safer alternatives;
5. Publicly announce these changes, and report on progress toward these goals.



2. Lead is again found in dollar store products

Ecology Center researchers used X-ray fluorescence (XRF) to scan for lead in **217** products. XRF technology is widely used by both product manufacturers and government regulators, including by the Consumer Product Safety Council (CPSC), to test consumer products for hazardous metals and other chemical elements.

Summary

- Four electronic bracelets purchased at Dollar General, and one light-up jump rope purchased at Dollar Tree, were found to contain lead in their interior parts, specifically solder. CHS has consistently found lead solder in children's electronics.³⁴
- Lead was also detected in three holiday items sold at dollar stores, including Easter and Valentine's Day themed decorations.

There is no safe level of exposure to lead, according to the most authoritative medical and scientific organizations.³⁵ Yet products containing lead are still sold at dollar stores.

State and federal laws continue to allow lead to be used in solder even though lead-free solder is widely available. This provides little incentive for companies to use safer substitutes.

Lead can be used as a stabilizer in PVC/ vinyl products and for pigmentation in paint, rubber, plastics, and ceramics. It can also be found in electronic products as solder. Over the years, our testing has repeatedly found heavy metals in dollar store jewelry³⁶ which is consistent with testing performed by federal and state government agencies. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has independently found heavy metals in [jewelry items](#) sold by dollar stores as recently as 2022. The [Washington State Department of Ecology](#) found illegal levels of lead in jewelry purchased at Dollar Tree in [2018, 2019, and 2021](#).³⁷

[The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act](#) (CPSIA) bans children's products containing more than 100 ppm of lead in an accessible component for sale in the U.S. But [EPA's website](#) openly acknowledges that "Toy jewelry containing unsafe levels of lead has [continued to be sold](#) even after CPSC issued guidance to prevent the sale of these products."³⁸ Underscoring the inadequacy of federal protections, the [New York Department of Health](#) instructs people not to give children cheap metal jewelry, and if such products are in the home, they recommend disposing of the jewelry following state and local environmental laws, and recommend against reselling it through online auctions or to thrift stores.^{39 40}

"Do not allow young children to be given or to play with cheap metal jewelry, especially when they are unsupervised. We have proof that lead in children's jewelry is dangerous and was pervasive in the marketplace. To prevent young children from possibly being exposed to lead, cadmium or any other hazardous heavy metal, take the jewelry away."

- NY Department of Health

In Europe, lead is restricted in all electronic products, including solder, and the State of California has adopted similar legislation. But in the U.S., lead solder is only restricted in plumbing for drinking water. Yet, **lead-free solder** is widely available on the market and used globally by manufacturers who sell to Europe.⁴¹

Allowing the use of lead content in products is unnecessary, puts consumers and children at risk, and it endangers workers who manufacture these products. Occupational exposure to lead compounds can cause headache, nausea, anemia, chronic muscle pain, while exposure to lead in women can affect fertility, and cause miscarriage or cognitive deficits in the offspring. Using lead-free alloys greatly reduces harmful exposure to solderers.⁴²



Safe Shopping Tip:

Avoid purchasing costume jewelry from dollar stores, especially if you have young children in your household.



Safe Shopping Tip:

Electronic toys and children's products may contain lead and other chemicals of concern in their interior components - do not keep them in the house if they are damaged, and keep away from very young children who might put them in their mouths.



Easter Light-Up Bracelet, purchased at Dollar General

Contains lead, bromine and antimony in its interior parts, which all pose particular health risks for children.

Made with PVC.

An Easter light-up bracelet, purchased at Dollar General, was found to contain almost 44% lead in its solder, (about 444,000 ppm. parts per million). Lead is often used in the solder of inexpensive electronic equipment, even though there are safer alternatives.⁴³ Along with the lead, high levels of bromine (10088 ppm) and antimony (1433 ppm) were found on the circuit board inside the bracelet. Antimony is toxic and several states have identified it as a safety concern for children's products.⁴⁴ FTIR tests also confirmed that this product was made from PVC, and the level of bromine detected in this product suggests the presence of brominated flame retardants which have 18 multiple health risks including endocrine disruption, reproductive effects, and cognitive deficits in children.⁴⁵ Such internal components are considered inaccessible by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) standards and are not typically tested by companies nor required to be tested by CPSC.



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Lead was also found in the solder of other Dollar General light-up bracelets and a PVC light-up jump rope purchased at Dollar Tree (pictured in section below).

Children can be exposed to lead solder in electronic toys by mouthing or handling them if they are damaged. These products will also likely end up in a landfill or trash incinerator, potentially releasing lead into the air, water, or soil. Yet lead-free solder is widely available on the market. There is no safe level of exposure to lead in children.⁴⁶ Mouthing or swallowing items that contain lead puts children at risk of lead poisoning,⁴⁷ which can cause learning and behavior difficulties and developmental delays.⁴⁸

Lead was found in a range of holiday decorations purchased at dollar stores, including plastic roses, Easter decorations and Valentine’s Day candy pails



Bouquet of plastic flowers, purchased at Dollar Tree

Contains lead (63 parts per million)



Easter-themed mini foam mushrooms purchased at Dollar Tree

Contain lead (68 parts per million)



Valentines Day candy pails purchased at Dollar Tree

Contain lead (96 parts per million of lead in its accessible components)

Although the levels of lead detected in the products above are permitted by federal law, there is no safe level of lead for children.

Both Dollar Tree and Dollar General list lead as a priority chemical for restriction, but only for their formulated private-brand products.

Dollar Tree lists lead in children’s products as part of their 17 Priority Chemicals list. They state that effective in 2020, Dollar Tree prohibits the intentional use of these 17 Priority Chemicals for formulated private-brand products.⁴⁹ Dollar General states that by fiscal year 2023, they plan to remove lead and cadmium as part of the nineteen chemicals to be restricted in its formulated private brand items in Home Cleaning, Beauty and Personal Care, and from its private brand cleaning products in the Hardware and Automotive departments.⁵⁰

Families shouldn’t have to read the fine print to know that dollar store products are free of lead.

Dollar General and Dollar Tree/Family Dollar should:

- 1. Require that all products they buy from suppliers are free of detectable levels of lead and other heavy metals;
- 2. Specify the use of lead-free solder in all electronic products they sell;
- 3. Publicly announce these restrictions and a compliance deadline, and publicly report on progress toward this goal.

Community in Spotlight:



Líderes Campesinas participating in CHS’ National Week of Action

Líderes Campesinas is a statewide network of farmworker women and youth, based in 18 farm working communities throughout California, organizing to create healthier working conditions, safer environments, and engaged women leaders. In spring 2024, organizers with Líderes Campesinas **mobilized to purchase dollar store products for testing, held direct actions** outside of dollar stores, **and also surveyed 243 members of their community** to ask whether they shopped regularly at dollar stores, what they bought, and if they considered dollar store products to be safe.

This survey confirmed that farmworker communities in California shopped regularly at dollar stores over the past year. 76% responded that they shopped at dollar stores at least once a month.



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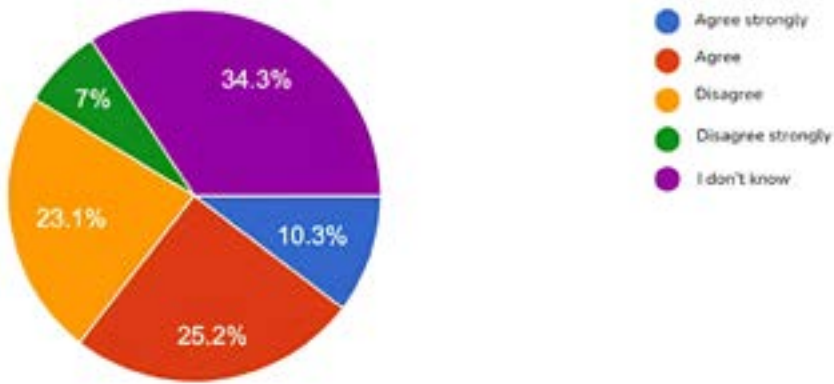
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The majority of those surveyed expressed doubt or uncertainty that dollar store products were safe. (34% responded they “didn’t know” if dollar store products were safe, and 30% responded that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed that dollar store products were safe).

Please provide your opinion on the following statement: “Dollar store products are safe.”



Many community members surveyed said that they purchased toys and children’s products (22%), cleaning products (64%), cups plates and utensils (52%), fruits and vegetables (36%) and personal hygiene products (36%) and holiday items such as Valentines Day, Easter, and Christmas themed items(40%).

Farmworkers and their children have been shown to have higher levels of pesticides in their bodies - in some cases 400 times greater than the national average.⁵¹ Exposure to harmful chemicals in dollar store products will only add to their chemical burden.

“Our surveys show that farm worker communities in central California are shopping regularly at dollar stores, and many are buying toys, cleaning products, personal hygiene products, and holiday items. None of these products should be exposing our families to toxic chemicals.” said Yunuen Ibarra, Director of Programs at Líderes Campesinas.

Safe Shopping Tip:
Avoid purchasing plastic toys as much as possible, especially for very young children who might put them in their mouths. Wood, cotton, and natural materials are safer to look for if buying for young children. PVC items are not clearly marked in stores.



3. PVC, the “Poison Plastic,” is widely available at dollar stores - including in the toy aisle.





Ecology Center researchers used X-ray fluorescence (XRF) to screen for chlorine, an indicator of PVC (polyvinyl chloride), in 217 products. Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) was used to screen a subset of these products (pictured below) to confirm the presence of PVC.

Summary

- Ten children’s products purchased at Dollar General and eleven children’s products purchased at Dollar Tree/ Family Dollar contained PVC.⁵²
- Over one quarter of the 217 products tested had chlorine above 3,500 ppm, which indicates intentional use of either chlorinated polymers like PVC, or chlorinated chemicals such as flame retardants.

Polyvinyl chloride plastic, also known as vinyl or PVC, is a plastic of high concern due to its toxic lifecycle. By continuing to sell PVC products, dollar store chains are contributing to demand for this “poison plastic”. To begin with, PVC is made from vinyl chloride—a known human carcinogen associated with liver cancer, brain and lung cancers, and cancers of the blood. The EPA, the U.S. The Department of Health and Human Services, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer, have all classified vinyl chloride as a known human carcinogen.⁵³ PVC plastics plants in the US reported releasing more than 400,000 pounds of carcinogenic vinyl chloride into the air in 2021, posing risks to downwind vulnerable environmental justice communities.⁵⁴

In 2021, Dollar Tree committed to “eliminate the use of PVC in all private-brand children’s products” by 2024.⁵⁵ But private-brand products are not clearly marked - so **shoppers have no way of knowing whether the toys they pick up at the store are PVC-free or not.** And while Dollar Tree “encourages” its “national brand suppliers” to find safer alternatives to PVC, our testing suggests that PVC toys can readily be found on Dollar Tree shelves.

 <p>Pony toy purchased at Dollar Tree <i>Made with PVC</i></p>	 <p>Elmo figurine purchased at Dollar Tree <i>Made with PVC</i></p>
 <p>Baby doll purchased at Dollar Tree <i>Made with PVC Contains antimony (210 ppm)</i></p>	 <p>Light-up jump rope purchased at Dollar Tree <i>Plastic components made with PVC Contains lead (614,776 ppm) and antimony (351 ppm) in its interior parts.</i></p>



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Dino Buddy toy purchased at Dollar General
Made with PVC



Colorful plastic straws purchased at Dollar General
Made with PVC



Pony Necklace Activity purchased at Dollar General
Made with PVC



Critter Creatures plastic figures purchased at Dollar General
Made with PVC

Communities of color and low-income residents living near PVC manufacturing plants are regularly exposed to toxic chemicals from air emissions, and also face **elevated risks from chemical disasters, including leaks, fires and explosions.** ⁵⁶ Numerous **other highly hazardous chemicals are used or released** during the production, use, and disposal of PVC plastic, including chlorine gas, asbestos, mercury, ethylene dichloride, phthalates, bisphenol A (BPA), organotins, heavy metals, chlorinated paraffins, dioxins and furans, and numerous other additives and chlorinated byproducts. ⁵⁷ The community in Pasadena, TX is one example.



Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (TEJAS)
Participating in CHS' 2024 National Week of Action

OxyChem, a subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum, is a major PVC resin producer in Pasadena, Texas, which is part of greater Houston. Vinyl chloride is produced at the Oxy Vinyls LP Pasadena PVC Plant. Thirtyeight percent of the population within 3 miles of the facility is low income, and 77% are people of color (compared to 41% people of color in the U.S. population).⁵⁸ This facility is covered by the EPA's Risk Management Program (RMP), which regulates facilities that use or store highly hazardous substances, and present chemical disaster risks.⁵⁹

Like many communities, especially areas that are significantly low income or people of color, Pasadena faces chemical hazards from other sources too. There are **41** other hazardous RMP facilities within three miles of the Oxy Vinyls plant. (See map.) Many RMP facilities have "worst case" disaster scenarios that could release toxic chemicals over an area up to 25 miles in radius. There are also **28** schools, and **6** dollar stores, within 3 miles of the Oxy Vinyls plant. In addition, facilities in that same radius emitted over 2 million pounds of toxic pollution in just one year.⁶⁰ **By stocking products made with PVC plastic, dollar store chains are contributing to demand for this "poison plastic" that adds to the toxic pollution and disaster potential in communities like Pasadena.**



On February 3, 2023, a train carrying vinyl chloride derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, leading to the incineration of the chemical and the release of hazardous compounds, including dioxins. The derailment triggered mass evacuations and raised fears about long-term health impacts. In addition, chemicals released during the train wreck fires were carried across 16 US states.⁶¹

"Vinyl chloride was found just outside my bedroom window and I'm convinced the chemicals from the train derailment have significantly affected my health. I've had sinus congestion, irritated eyes, skin rashes, and a bloody nose for a year now. The only advice my doctor could give me was to remove myself from my home. So I'm currently footing

This map was created by Material Research using ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® and ArcMap™ are the intellectual property of Esri and are used herein under license. Copyright © Esri. Schools layer by Data Axle and Dollar stores layer by Data Axle and Foursquare provided by Esri Business Analyst. Accessed 03/25. www.esri.com RMP layer data from: <https://www.dataliberation-project.org/datasets/epa-risk-management-program-database/>



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the bill for a rental home and utilities on top of the home my family has lived in for four generations.” Hilary Flint, Director of Communications and Community Engagement for Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community said in a recent report⁶²

Dioxins are a family of chemicals that are formed from the manufacture and burning of chlorinated chemicals, like those used to make PVC. Because PVC contains chlorine, dioxins can be generated when PVC products are incinerated, burned in backyard fires, or in landfill fires. Dioxins are highly toxic and can cause cancer, reproductive and developmental problems, damage to the immune system, and can interfere with hormones.⁶³

PVC products need a cocktail of additives like plasticizers to make the product flexible. Approximately 90% of all phthalates are used to soften PVC plastic. Many phthalates are endocrine disruptors and harm reproductive health.⁶⁴ Toxic metals such as lead, cadmium, and organotins can be used as stabilizers in PVC products⁶⁵ and toxic flame retardants can be added to suppress fires.⁶⁶ All additives will eventually leach from PVC products over time, contaminating the indoor and outdoor environment.⁶⁷

PVC products are hard to recycle because of the chemical cocktail in different PVC products. Because PVC can contaminate and ruin other recyclable plastics, it is considered an unwanted contaminant to the recycling process for packaging.⁶⁸ That is why most PVC ends up in landfills and incinerators. As PVC breaks down into microplastics it contributes to the growing threat of microplastics in our environment and in our bodies.⁶⁹

For timely information about PVC hazards in the U.S. see Toxic Free Future’s most recent reports and up to date information about [vinyl chloride and PVC plastic](#).

As Toxic Free Future notes: Major businesses and retailers have adopted policies to phase out and ban PVC including Apple, HP, IKEA, Johnson & Johnson, Microsoft, Nike, and Samsung. And dozens of leading businesses have signed onto the U.S. Plastics Pact to eliminate PVC and other problematic packaging materials, such as Target and Walmart.⁷⁰

Dollar General and Dollar Tree/Family Dollar should

1. Stop supporting the toxic PVC life cycle; and
2. Eliminate all PVC products from their stores, not just PVC packaging or PVC in private-brand children’s products.



Safe Shopping Tip:
Skip the receipt, or wash your hands after handling thermal paper receipts.

4. BPS Found in all Thermal Receipts – A classic case of regrettable substitution

Ecology Center tested dollar store receipts for the presence of harmful bisphenols, using Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) Ecology Center tested dollar store receipts for the presence of harmful bisphenols, using Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR)

Summary

- 32 thermal paper receipts collected from 32 different dollar stores were found to contain bisphenol S (BPS) as the primary color developer. Bisphenol A (BPA) was not detected.



Historically, BPA was used in receipt paper but became linked to developmental and health problems in children, including learning and behavior conditions like Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), anxiety and depression; early puberty in girls; diabetes; obesity; breast cancer and heart disease.⁷¹

These concerns led to various restrictions on BPA use and in response, the chemical industry produced a BPA-free substitute with similar properties: -- BPS which is now widely found in retailer receipts⁷²

Now BPS is found to be more toxic to the reproductive system than BPA and can hormonally promote certain breast cancers at the same rate as BPA.⁷³ This is a classic case of ‘regrettable substitution’ when a chemical or material replacement turns out to be just as hazardous, or even more so, than the problematic one. It is also why companies need to eliminate all bisphenols.

Bisphenol-free alternatives exist on the market. As part of Washington state’s ban on all bisphenols in receipt paper, it identified **safer alternatives that are already in use**, including Pergafast 201® and ereceipts.⁷⁴ **Toxic Free Future** notes that Target, Walgreens, and CVS Health have recently removed bisphenols from receipts, and a number of other retailers like Best Buy, Costco, REI, and Whole Foods Market already removed the chemicals in prior years. **It is time, yet again, for dollar stores to catch up.**



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In particular, Dollar General, Dollar Tree/Family Dollar should:

1. Discontinue their use of BPS in receipt papers and switch to a non-bisphenol developer, invest in e-receipt system and reduce the printing of receipts by offering a choice to customers of no, receipt, paper receipt, or e-receipt;
2. In addition to receipts, identify the use of bisphenols in private-brand and national brand products;
3. Report on progress to eliminate bisphenols in all product categories.



Safe Shopping Tip:

When buying pots and pans, skip anything labeled “non-stick” and look for cast iron, enamel or stainless steel cookware whenever possible, to avoid potential exposure to PFAS.

5. No PFAS in Microwaveable Popcorn Samples – an important step toward eliminating ‘forever chemicals’ from our food

In 2025, four samples of microwaveable popcorn from four different brands (Orville Redenbacher, Act II, Clover Valley, Pop Secret) were purchased from Dollar General and Dollar Tree and sent to Galbraith Laboratories to test for the presence of total fluorine and fluoride, indicators of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Summary

- All results showed the absence of total fluorine and fluoride below the threshold of 10ppm. In other words, the brands have switched to non-PFAS packaging.

For many years, the Campaign for Healthier Solutions, along with many other advocacy groups, have called for the elimination of PFAS, particularly in food packaging. The Campaign encouraged families to make their own healthy popcorn, rather than buy from dollar stores, because PFAS was detected in the packaging of microwavable popcorn sold at Dollar General and Family Dollar.



We are pleased to find out that microwaveable popcorn bags purchased at dollar stores no longer contain PFAS! These findings reflect the efforts by dozens of U.S. states to proactively ban PFAS in food packaging. (Of course, making popcorn at home without packaging waste is always a good option too, as shown in the video).

Video: ‘How to Make 2-minute Toxic-free Popcorn’ at <https://youtu.be/8GVcWCqClGg>

This is an important win on many fronts. PFAS are commonly found in fast food containers, non-stick frying pans, waterproof textiles and many other uses because they are resistant to water, grease, dirt and heat. They are also known as the ‘forever chemicals’ because they do not break down in the environment, and they are linked to a number of diseases, including liver damage, decreased fertility, asthma, thyroid disease and various forms of cancer. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found PFAS in the blood of 97% of Americans. ⁷⁵

These testing results show the power of advocacy and consumer action to eliminate PFAS in this food application.

Dollar General and Dollar Tree/Family Dollar should:

Immediately add the entire class of PFAS to their restricted substances lists for all products (not just private label products) and announce an aggressive timeline for implementation of this restriction, with regular public reporting on progress toward this goal.

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