

My name is Alicia Cohen and I'm the mother of two children (15 and one 11) both born and raised in Oregon. Before they were born I thought only occasionally about chemicals in the products around me. I bought organic food as much as I could afford and I'd always been somewhat sensitive to perfumes and "chemical" or "toxic" smells. But it was having children that clarified for me up the profound and unethical negligence in regards to toxics which is endemic to consumer products. To some degree, companies are to blame for making toxic products but the lack of government regulation that would create a safe and fair playing field for everyone, both businesses and consumers alike, is the real problem here.

The light bulb moment for me was on my oldest child's first birthday. Her grandparents gave her a doll play set. The package once opened filled our living room with a toxic chemical smell. I wondered. "Is that ok for her to be playing with?" She was already mouthing the doll's head. I thought to myself, "certainly they wouldn't make kids' toys that were toxic for children?" That day I started doing research on the topic and I'm still discovering more everyday, fifteen years later. I never cease to be shocked by the incredible amount of toxics we and our kids are exposed to everyday. I've read books, talked to our doctors, listened to lectures by researchers, joined toxics advocacy groups, and have written letters calling for a safe, nontoxic consumer environment.

After discovering how dangerous many of the chemicals commonly found in kids' products were, I became strict about what I'd let into our home. I vetted each toy and tossed many, many gifts, and variously acquired treasures directly in the trash. Throwing away toxic toys was right for my kids but I felt horrible for the species and ecosystems downstream that would certainly be impacted by my consumer trash.

I felt like I was my family's own personal, private EPA. I'm not a scientist or public health professional so it was hard, confusing and frustrating work. It is hard enough to be a parent without the stress and anxiety of constantly worrying and never being able to answer the basic, simple question, what-in-the world is that made of? And it broke my heart to know that I was the exception to the rule. That most kids were exposed day and night to toxics, to literal poisons, in their most intimate and dear environments. I also struggled because there was no way to "really" protect my kids since these toxics are so ubiquitous and we are social creatures. They play at friends' houses, at school, at camp. Everywhere they go, our kids are regularly exposed -- pointlessly, unnecessarily -- to multiple and serious toxics. It doesn't have to be this way. We know how steep the cost is for not having solid regulations. It is a cost paid by our whole society but first and foremost by our most vulnerable and precious citizens, our little ones. They pay for it in days of school lost to illness, in feeling less-than-well, in sleep disruption, and in cognitive impacts. Sometimes they even pay with their lives through deadly diseases caused or exacerbated by toxics, particularly cancers. We don't have to live like this. We can immeasurably improve the quality of life for all Oregonians by making sure children's toys are safe and non toxic. We provide give parents and caregivers safe consumer choices. I can't imagine how much time, stress, depression and worry I would have been spared if I could have raised my kids in a safer, more informed, less toxic world. It is a world we can win and it is a world we must fight for.