

The **toxic nation** Guide to Vinyl: shower curtains and other products

What is vinyl?

Vinyl shower curtains and other vinyl products are made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Other chemicals such as phthalates (see below) are added to PVC to make it soft or give it other practical characteristics.

Where is vinyl used?

PVC is used in shower curtains, rain coats, plastic food wrap and food packaging, medical equipment, children's toys, construction materials and other products. As a building material PVC is cheap and easy to install.



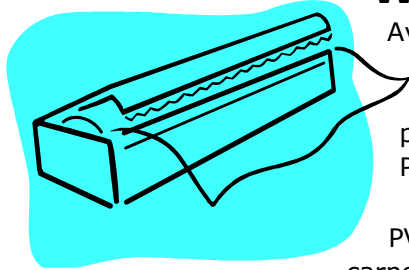
Why is vinyl a concern?

PVC products contain and can leach toxic additives like phthalates, lead, cadmium, organotins, and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which are associated with reproductive and developmental problems, central nervous system damage, liver damage and other adverse health effects. During manufacturing and waste incineration PVC releases dioxins into the air. Dioxins are linked with cancer, diabetes, endometriosis, birth defects, infertility, and immune-system depression.

What is that strange smell?

When you open your new package of vinyl shower curtains or other vinyl products, the 'plastic' or 'chemical' smell released is due to the off-gassing of chemicals from the vinyl product. Toxic chemical off-gassing from PVC products may contribute to respiratory irritation, damage to the central nervous system, liver and kidneys, nausea, headaches and loss of coordination.

What can Canadians do?



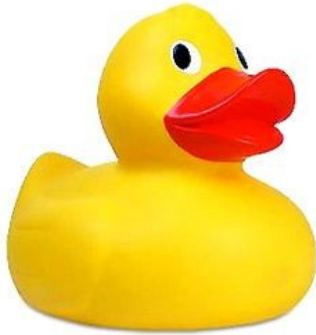
Avoid shower curtains and other products made of PVC. These products are not always labeled, but some may be labeled as 'vinyl' or 'PVC' or have a #3 recycling symbol on the bottom. Avoid products that do not indicate what they are made of. Instead, buy PVC-free shower curtains made of safer materials such as cotton.

PVC is used to make a slew of products around your home, such as carpeting, flooring, piping, children's toys, office supplies etc. and many products which are also available in PVC-free materials.

Tests show that most toxic chemicals off-gas from vinyl shower curtains within the first month of a new product being installed, so ensure that your PVC products off-gas outside of your home.

Company policies.

IKEA set an international standard and phased out PVC shower curtains over 11 years ago, switching to ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA) as a plastic alternative. Other retailers, including Sears Canada and Wal-Mart, are developing or in the midst of reducing PVC products sold in their stores.



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What are phthalates?

Phthalates are a family of chemicals that are used to make hard plastic, like PVC, soft, and are also used in personal care products. As endocrine disruptors, phthalates can interfere with the normal functioning of the hormone system of both people and wildlife in a number of ways to produce a wide range of adverse effects including reproductive, developmental and behavioural problems. Phthalates do not remain in the plastic materials or other products; instead they can easily migrate to the surface then into food, beverages, and our bodies. Phthalates have also been detected in household dust. The European Union has banned the more hazardous phthalates from products, and Canada should do the

Who is most at risk?

Foetuses, infants and children around puberty. Young children are especially vulnerable because endocrine disruptors affect how their bodies grow and develop. Kids have immature organs, high metabolic rates, relatively low bodyweight, and are going through rapid physical development.

What can I do?

- Send a message through our website (www.toxicnation.ca) to Canadian government urging them to ban vinyl shower curtains!
- Tell your friends and family about the potential health risks of vinyl shower curtains and encourage them to use PVC-free products! You can make a difference.
- Register for our Toxic Nation e-newsletter (www.toxicnation.ca).
- Download the report **Volatile Vinyl: The New Shower Curtain's Chemical Smell** (www.toxicnation.ca).
- Go online or call our office at 1(877) 399-2333 or (416) 323-9521 to our work today. Our campaign depends on your generous donations. Thank you.



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