



## Choosing Safer Products Helps Improve the Health of Communities



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The Premier healthcare alliance is committed to protecting the environment and maintaining a safe and healthy climate for patients, workers and communities. Premier and its members are leaders in the industry, setting the bar for environmentally preferable purchasing and healthcare practices and working to transform healthcare.

The alliance understands that the healthcare sector is the single largest user of chemicals. For example, it is estimated that healthcare spends over \$106 billion in direct purchases of chemicals and chemical products each year, more than double the amount spent by the second largest consuming industry sector. The many chemicals to which patients and workers in healthcare may be exposed include cleaners and disinfectants, chemicals of concern in medical devices, flame retardants and formaldehyde in furniture, and solvents and formaldehyde in labs, among many others. These

products also have life cycle impacts, affecting workers who manufacture them and the communities that host manufacturing or disposal facilities.

The Premier Safety Institute® ([www.premierinc.com/safety](http://www.premierinc.com/safety)) provides comprehensive resources, including case studies, tools, measurement programs and management plans, to promote a healthy, safe and sustainable healthcare delivery environment for patients, workers and their communities. We partner with recognized environmental industry leaders, including Health Care Without Harm, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Practice Greenhealth and other stakeholders to deliver environmental best practices, solutions and programs to alliance members.

### Purchasing Safer Products

As part of GreenHealthy®, our award-winning environmental leadership program, Premier's Environmentally Preferable

Purchasing (EPP) program identifies environmentally friendly products, packaging and services. Premier's EPP program is a partnership between the Premier Safety Institute and the group purchasing program. In collaboration with our contracted suppliers and group purchasing contract teams and committees, Premier helps ensure the availability of environmentally friendly products and services for members.

Premier incorporates EPP guidelines when evaluating and awarding its group purchasing contracts and gives special consideration to suppliers that support

### Premier Highlights

The Premier healthcare alliance operates a leading healthcare purchasing network.

- \$36 billion of annual contracting volume
- Contracts for:
  - 2,500+ hospitals
  - 73,000+ other healthcare sites
- Owned by hospitals, health systems and other providers
- Received "Champion for Change" award from Practice Greenhealth for nine consecutive years
- Early adopter of EPEAT criteria plus additional toxicity issues in procurement of environmentally friendly electronics in 2005
- Endorsed BizNGO Guiding Principles for Chemicals Policy in 2008
- Inaugural eStewards Enterprise member committed to the world's highest standards for electronic recycling to reduce toxics in the environment in 2010

environmentally friendly products and packaging. We have incorporated environmental criteria in our contract sourcing process, including all requests for proposal and requests for information. We also enhanced our electronic request for information tool, PassPort, to gather specific information from suppliers about their products, including:

- Chemical composition of products:
  - mercury,
  - bisphenol A (BPA),
  - chlorinated and halogenated flame retardants,
  - volatile organic compounds,
  - polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic,
  - di-2-ethylhexyl phthalate (DEHP),
  - latex,
  - chlorine,
  - California Proposition 65 chemical compounds and
  - persistent bioaccumulative toxicants (PBTs) and other U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) priority chemicals.
- Third party certifications such as Green Seal.
- Compliance with selected regulations—for example, California's Gold Sustainable Carpet Standard.
- Information on hormones, antibiotics and steroids in food.

Premier pledged in 2001 to eliminate mercury-containing products from its group purchasing contract portfolio and provide a publicly accessible list of mercury-free products on contract. Together with members of Health Care Without Harm and Practice Greenhealth, we are working to reduce PVC and DEHP in our purchases. We provide public lists of suppliers and contracted products that are environmentally preferable at our Premier Safety Institute website at [www.premierinc.com/saferproducts](http://www.premierinc.com/saferproducts) and additional detail in our electronic Supply Chain Advisor member catalog. An industry first, we have standardized the nomenclature of key environmental attributes to enhance search capability in Supply Chain Advisor for specific products that are latex-free, PVC-free, DEHP-free and mercury-free.

## Policy Change Necessary for Public Protection

While successfully shifting the market to safer alternatives in some cases, our



actions alone—along with those of others in the healthcare sector—will not result in the type of protections needed to adequately protect human health and the environment. In spite of our requests for information on specific chemicals of concern in products, we must still make product selection decisions with incomplete information about product constituents and toxicity. In addition, healthcare institutions may inadvertently continue to use hazardous materials due to lack of information, lack of available alternatives or because the full costs of toxic products are not reflected in the purchase price. Addressing one aspect of this larger problem, Premier submitted a letter of support to the Food and Drug Administration for the labeling of packaging containing DEHP.

Changes in the existing regulatory system should accompany the efforts underway by those in the marketplace. The Toxic Substances Control Act, the law governing industrial chemicals in the U.S., should be strengthened. Together with eight other healthcare organizations, Premier submitted a letter to Congress in 2010 on the need for more oversight of industrial chemicals with increased disclosure and promotion of safer alternatives. Specifically, the following changes should be made:

- **Take immediate action on the worst chemicals:** Some chemicals, including PBTs, are too hazardous to continue using because of the harm they can cause to human health and the environment. The U.S. EPA should be given the authority to immediately phase out the use of the worst chemicals to

which people can be exposed and should act upon that authority expeditiously. The U.S. EPA also should immediately act to reduce our exposure to other chemicals of high concern to human health or the environment.

- **Require and disclose basic information for all chemicals:** Chemical manufacturers should be required to provide full information on the health and environmental hazards associated with their chemicals, how they are used and the ways that the public or workers could be exposed. The U.S. EPA should be required to make such data easily accessible to the public.
- **Ensure chemical manufacturers demonstrate the safety of their products:** Chemical manufacturers should be required to demonstrate the safety of their products based on a health standard that explicitly requires the protection of the most vulnerable subpopulations, including children, workers, pregnant women and fenceline communities located closest to industrial sources of chemical contamination.
- **Promote safer alternatives:** There should be national support for research into green chemistry and engineering and policies should favor safer chemicals and products over those with known health hazards.

The Premier healthcare alliance is committed not only to healing, but to prevention. Addressing the shortcomings of the chemical regulatory system is one of the most critical initiatives to prevent disease and protect public health.