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Toxic chemicals found in household products

http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0807/080729-household_products.html

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THE ARTICLE

New research has found that many common household products contain harmful chemicals. The University of Washington study analyzed a range of six top-selling fabric softeners, detergents and air fresheners. Researchers discovered at least one chemical in the products that are described as toxic or hazardous under US laws. Professor Anne Steinemann said: "I was surprised by both the number and the potential toxicity of the chemicals that were found." She added: "I didn't find a brand that didn't emit at least one toxic chemical." She explained that the chemicals included acetone, which is an active ingredient in paint thinner and nail-polish remover. She also outlined a number of other hazardous chemicals.

Test results showed 58 different volatile chemicals above the recommended safety level. Researchers found an air freshener that contained more than 20 different harmful compounds, of which, seven are regulated as being toxic. Steinemann's advice for consumers was: "Be careful if you buy products with fragrance, because you really don't know what's in them....I'd like to see better labeling. In the meantime, I'd recommend that instead of air fresheners people use ventilation, and with laundry products, choose fragrance-free versions." Her conclusions angered manufacturers, who said the research "really lacks a real-world risk perspective". A spokesman said the products were safe and did not cause ill health.

WARM-UPS

1. FRAGRANCES: Walk around the class and talk to other students about fragrances. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your partner(s) and share your findings.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

research / household products / air fresheners / toxic chemicals / nail-polish remover / safety levels / advice for consumers / fragrances / laundry products / risk / ill health

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. HOUSEHOLD DANGERS: Do you ever worry whether the things around you are dangerous? With your partner(s), write down the possible dangers of these things. Change partners and share what you talked about.

Things	Dangers
Air fresheners	
Detergents	
Microwave oven	
Television	
Shampoo	
Toothpaste	
Electricity	
Water	

4. FRAGRANCES: Rate the smells below: 10 = "Heavenly" 1 = "Yuck. Yuck. And double yuck". Discuss your ratings and reasons with your partner(s).

_____ air fresheners

_____ detergents

_____ perfume

_____ coffee

_____ petrol

_____ body odour (B.O.)

_____ garlic

_____ the countryside

5. HEADLINE PREDICTION: With your partner(s), use the words in the "Chat" activity above to predict what the news article will be about. Once you have your story, change partners and share them. Who was closest to the real story?

6. CHEMICALS: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'chemicals'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. A study found all household products contain dangerous chemicals. T / F
- b. Researchers tested six products to see find out their levels of toxicity. T / F
- c. A professor was not in the least surprised at finding toxic chemicals. T / F
- d. The same chemical is found in nail-polish remover and air fresheners. T / F
- e. Researchers found 58 chemicals that exceeded suggested safety limits. T / F
- f. A researcher urged caution when buying things like air freshener. T / F
- g. Air freshener and detergent manufacturers welcomed the research. T / F
- h. An industry spokesman said his products did not make people sick. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1. common | a. unstable |
| 2. products | b. dangerous |
| 3. toxic | c. scent |
| 4. hazardous | d. goods |
| 5. emit | e. everyday |
| 6. volatile | f. mixtures |
| 7. recommended | g. poisonous |
| 8. compounds | h. view |
| 9. fragrance | i. release |
| 10. perspective | j. suggested |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. analyzed a range of six top- | a. under US laws |
| 2. described as toxic or hazardous | b. remover |
| 3. emit at least one | c. angered manufacturers |
| 4. nail-polish | d. free versions |
| 5. hazardous | e. did not cause ill health |
| 6. above the recommended | f. toxic chemical |
| 7. choose fragrance- | g. perspective |
| 8. Her conclusions | h. chemicals |
| 9. lacks a real-world risk | i. selling fabric softeners |
| 10. the products were safe and | j. safety level |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

New research has found that many _____ household products contain harmful chemicals. The University of Washington study analyzed a _____ of six top-selling fabric softeners, detergents and air fresheners. Researchers discovered at _____ one chemical in the products that are described as toxic or hazardous _____ US laws. Professor Anne Steinemann said: "I was surprised by both the number and the _____ toxicity of the chemicals that were found." She added: "I didn't find a brand that didn't _____ at least one toxic chemical." She explained that the chemicals included acetone, which is an _____ ingredient in paint thinner and nail-polish remover. She also outlined a _____ of other hazardous chemicals.

active

least

potential

common

number

range

emit

under

Test results showed 58 _____ volatile chemicals above the recommended safety _____. Researchers found an air freshener that contained more than 20 different harmful compounds, of which, seven are _____ as being toxic. Steinemann's advice for consumers was: "Be careful if you buy products with _____, because you really don't know what's in them....I'd like to see better _____. In the meantime, I'd recommend that instead of air fresheners people use ventilation, and with _____ products, choose fragrance-free _____." Her conclusions angered manufacturers, who said the research "really lacks a real-world _____ perspective". A spokesman said the products were safe and did not cause ill health.

regulated

risk

different

fragrance

laundry

level

labeling

versions

LISTENING: Listen and fill in the spaces.

New research has _____ common household products contain harmful chemicals. The University of Washington study _____ of six top-selling fabric softeners, detergents and air fresheners. Researchers discovered _____ chemical in the products that are described as toxic or hazardous under US laws. Professor Anne Steinemann said: "I was _____ the number and the potential toxicity of the chemicals that were found." She added: "I didn't find a brand that _____ least one toxic chemical." She explained that the chemicals included acetone, which is an _____ in paint thinner and nail-polish remover. She also outlined a number of other hazardous chemicals.

Test results showed 58 different _____ above the recommended _____. Researchers found an air freshener that contained more than 20 different harmful compounds, of which, seven are regulated _____. Steinemann's advice for consumers was: "Be careful if you buy products with fragrance, because you really don't know what's in them....I'd like to see _____. In the meantime, I'd recommend that instead of air fresheners people use ventilation, and with laundry products, choose _____ versions." Her conclusions angered manufacturers, who said the research "really lacks a real-world _____ ". A spokesman said the products were safe and did not cause ill health.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**toxic**' and '**chemical**'.

toxic	chemical
--------------	-----------------

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• common• range• described• potential• emit• active	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• level• seven• careful• labeling• versions• risk
--	--

STUDENT FRAGRANCES SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about fragrances in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What springs to mind when you hear the word 'air freshener'?
- c) Do you think the chemicals in air fresheners and laundry products are totally safe?
- d) Do you like air fresheners?
- e) Do you ever think about the chemicals in things like soap and detergent?
- f) Should the manufacturers of the six products be punished?
- g) Has a household product ever made you ill?
- h) Will this article make you think twice about buying household products?
- i) Do you think there should be tighter controls on manufacturers?
- j) Is this research valid if it only tested six products?

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HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) What would you do if you saw a toxic chemical listed on the ingredients of something you bought?
- c) Are air fresheners necessary?
- d) Would better labeling on detergents help consumers who have little knowledge of chemicals?
- e) Do you think manufacturers are right to be angry?
- f) What is a "real-world risk perspective"?
- g) How dangerous do you think your household products are?
- h) Who do you trust more, the professor or the industry spokesman?
- i) What questions would you like to ask Professor Anne Steinemann?
- j) What questions would you like to ask the industry spokesman?

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LANGUAGE

New research has found that (1) ____ common household products contain harmful chemicals. The University of Washington study analyzed a range (2) ____ six top-selling fabric softeners, detergents and air fresheners. Researchers discovered at (3) ____ one chemical in the products that are described as toxic or hazardous under US laws. Professor Anne Steinemann said: "I was surprised by (4) ____ the number and the potential toxicity of the chemicals that were found." She added: "I didn't find a brand that didn't (5) ____ at least one toxic chemical." She explained that the chemicals included acetone, which is an active ingredient in paint thinner and nail-polish remover. She also outlined a (6) ____ of other hazardous chemicals.

Test results showed 58 different volatile chemicals (7) ____ the recommended safety level. Researchers found an air freshener that contained more than 20 different (8) ____ compounds, of which, seven are regulated as being toxic. Steinemann's (9) ____ for consumers was: "Be careful if you buy products with fragrance, because you really don't know what's in them....I'd like to see better labeling. In the (10) ____, I'd recommend that instead of air fresheners people use ventilation, and with laundry products, choose fragrance-free versions." Her conclusions (11) ____ manufacturers, who said the research "really lacks a real-world risk perspective". A spokesman said the products were safe and did not cause (12) ____ health.

Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.

- | | | | | |
|-----|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. | (a) lots | (b) much | (c) a lot | (d) many |
| 2. | (a) of | (b) with | (c) by | (d) for |
| 3. | (a) last | (b) least | (c) less | (d) lost |
| 4. | (a) for | (b) of | (c) both | (d) some |
| 5. | (a) commit | (b) omit | (c) emit | (d) remit |
| 6. | (a) numeral | (b) number | (c) numerous | (d) numerical |
| 7. | (a) high | (b) on top of | (c) overhead | (d) above |
| 8. | (a) harmful | (b) harmless | (c) harm | (d) harms |
| 9. | (a) advising | (b) advice | (c) advisor | (d) advise |
| 10. | (a) timesaver | (b) time lag | (c) lunch time | (d) meantime |
| 11. | (a) angering | (b) anger | (c) angered | (d) angrily |
| 12. | (a) ill | (b) illness | (c) ill will | (d) ill-gotten |

HOMework

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find out more about chemicals in household products in your country. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. MY CHEMICALS: Look at the label of some of your household products. Make a poster about the chemicals in them. Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

4. TOXIC AIR: Write a magazine article about how air fresheners might damage your health. Include imaginary interviews with someone who became ill after breathing in air freshener fragrances, and the CEO of an air freshener company.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

5. LETTER: Write a letter to Professor Anne Steinemann. Ask her three questions about her research. Ask her for three pieces of advice on your household products. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. F d. T e. T f. T g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1. common | a. everyday |
| 2. products | b. goods |
| 3. toxic | c. poisonous |
| 4. hazardous | d. dangerous |
| 5. emit | e. release |
| 6. volatile | f. unstable |
| 7. recommended | g. suggested |
| 8. compounds | h. mixtures |
| 9. fragrance | i. scent |
| 10. perspective | j. view |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. analyzed a range of six top- | a. selling fabric softeners |
| 2. described as toxic or hazardous | b. under US laws |
| 3. emit at least one | c. toxic chemical |
| 4. nail-polish | d. remover |
| 5. hazardous | e. chemicals |
| 6. above the recommended | f. safety level |
| 7. choose fragrance- | g. free versions |
| 8. Her conclusions | h. angered manufacturers |
| 9. lacks a real-world risk | i. perspective |
| 10. the products were safe and | j. did not cause ill health |

GAP FILL:

Toxic chemicals found in household products

New research has found that many **common** household products contain harmful chemicals. The University of Washington study analyzed a **range** of six top-selling fabric softeners, detergents and air fresheners. Researchers discovered at **least** one chemical in the products that are described as toxic or hazardous **under** US laws. Professor Anne Steinemann said: "I was surprised by both the number and the **potential** toxicity of the chemicals that were found." She added: "I didn't find a brand that didn't **emit** at least one toxic chemical." She explained that the chemicals included acetone, which is an **active** ingredient in paint thinner and nail-polish remover. She also outlined a **number** of other hazardous chemicals.

Test results showed 58 **different** volatile chemicals above the recommended safety **level**. Researchers found an air freshener that contained more than 20 different harmful compounds, of which, seven are **regulated** as being toxic. Steinemann's advice for consumers was: "Be careful if you buy products with **fragrance**, because you really don't know what's in them...I'd like to see better **labeling**. In the meantime, I'd recommend that instead of air fresheners people use ventilation, and with **laundry** products, choose fragrance-free **versions**." Her conclusions angered manufacturers, who said the research "really lacks a real-world **risk** perspective". A spokesman said the products were safe and did not cause ill health.

LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - d 2 - a 3 - b 4 - c 5 - c 6 - b 7 - d 8 - a 9 - b 10 - d 11 - c 12 - a