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Sanitary Pads can be a health hazard!

Toxics Link finds toxic chemicals in sanitary products

New Delhi: A new study titled “*Wrapped in Secrecy: Toxic Chemicals in Menstrual Products*,” released by environmental NGO Toxics Link today, has revealed the presence of toxic chemicals, including Phthalates and VOCs, in organic and inorganic sanitary pads, sold in the Indian market. The study tested most of the major brands of sanitary pads, including organic and inorganic, available in the country, and detected these chemicals that can cause skin irritation, allergic reactions and can be endocrine disruptors for users. The report reveals new information on contaminants found in sanitary pads that can also cause cancer and release microplastic particles into the environment.

The study conducted this year tested ten brands of pads and found traces of Phthalates and VOCs in all the samples. 12 different types of phthalates (DIBP, DBP, DINP, DIDP, DMP, DEP, BBP, DNOP, DEHP, DHP, DIPP, DPP) were found. The highest concentration of Phthalates detected in the test sanitary pads was 19460 µg/kg of DIDP in one of the tested organic pads. Phthalates have been linked to various health issues, including endocrine disruption, effects on the heart and reproductive systems, diabetes, some cancers, and congenital disabilities.

A total of 24 different VOCs was found in both organic and inorganic samples. Some of the VOCs detected were xylene, benzene, chloroform, trichloroethylene, among others which can increase the risk of brain impairment, asthma, disabilities, certain cancers, and the proper functioning of the reproductive system. Dr Amit, Programme Coordinator, Toxics Link, one of the investigators, said, “it is shocking to find numerous harmful chemicals in commonly available sanitary products, including toxic chemicals like carcinogens, reproductive toxins, endocrine disruptors, and allergens.”

In 2021, the Indian sanitary pad market was valued around US\$ 618.4 million. The industry is set to witness a steady expansion, with various start-ups providing affordable sanitary pads, including biodegradable and organic alternatives. Presently, disposable sanitary pads are the most prevalent menstrual products used in India. But the safety of sanitary pads has been under discussion globally as studies have found concentrations of hazardous chemicals in them. The chemical exposure through pads can be more dangerous as the skin around this area is highly permeable. “As a mucous membrane, the vagina can secrete and absorb fluids at a higher rate than the skin,” said Dr Aakanksha Mehrotra, Programme Coordinator, Toxics Link who was part of this study.

In its study, Toxics Link has called for standards and restrictions to limit the presence of carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic substances in sanitary products. Currently, their composition, manufacture and use are not governed by a specific regulation but are subject to BIS standards. “People who use menstrual products available in the market deserve access to safe products and the right to know what ingredients they are exposed to. Producers must be mandated to provide relevant information and adequate warnings so that the risks can be assessed,” said Ms Priti Banthia Mahesh, Chief Programme Coordinator, Toxics Link.

“A thorough investigation on the presence and potential impact of exposure to VOCs and phthalates on menstruators through sanitary products and other female hygiene products needs to be taken up. It is critical to institutionalize efforts to reduce VOC and phthalate contents in these products. Regulations and schemes should encourage substituting or reducing toxic chemicals such as phthalates and VOCs,” adds Satish Sinha, Associate Director, Toxics Link.

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About Toxics Link:

Toxics Link is an Indian environmental research and advocacy organisation set up in 1996, engaged in disseminating information to help strengthen the campaign against toxics pollution, provide cleaner alternatives and bring together groups and people affected by this problem.

Toxics Link's Mission Statement – *“Working together for environmental justice and freedom from toxins.”*

More: www.toxicslink.org