



## WHAT'S NEW...

### WHEN SIGNS ON FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD

WHEN recently joined a varied group of organizations dedicated to raising awareness on environmental, economic and social issues and signed an Open Letter to the Citizens of Ontario ([www.alphabet-city.org/open\\_letter](http://www.alphabet-city.org/open_letter)). The letter encourages all of us to make the connections between how we grow, market, process, manufacture and distribute our food. Learn more under "campaigns" on our website [www.womenshealthyenvironments.ca](http://www.womenshealthyenvironments.ca). You will see more action from WHEN on the environmental concerns related to our individual and collective choices about food in 2008.

### COMMUNITY RIGHT TO KNOW CAMPAIGN

Led by the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), **WHEN** supports the Community Right to Know campaign, with the objective being that the public should rightfully know what toxic chemicals are used, stored and released in our city. Good news - this past summer, "the Board of Health (BOH) voted in favour of Toronto Public Health's (TPH) recommendation to develop a mandatory environmental reporting program which would require facilities to report the use and emissions of 25 toxic chemicals of priority health concern. TPH is due to report back to the BOH in spring 2008 on a draft bylaw and implementation plan." To learn more, go to [www.torontoenvironment.org](http://www.torontoenvironment.org).

### HELP US KEEP THIS NEWSLETTER GOING ...

In this season of giving, will you consider a donation to **WHEN**?

If you would like to make a donation to honour a friend or relative, we make that easy, too. Just click on the *Canada Helps* link at the top of our home page, and fill out the form. Of course, we also accept donations by mail or telephone ... anything you can manage will help us to continue delivering critical information about the health impacts of a compromised environment.

Thanks for your support!

### CONNECT ART: Where Environment and Art Meet

Last month WHEN, in conjunction with the Art Gallery of Ontario Youth Council, hosted the fundraiser **Connect Art – Making the connections between art and the environment**. Look for the mural of recycled materials that participants created during the evening to be displayed at WHEN's future home at the Green Arts Barn in 2008. A big thank you to all who participated in **Connect Art** – the support and donations were outstanding and the evening was a great success. Read more on our website under "events" and please do join us for our next event!



## Calendar of Events

### Green Reel Environmental Film Festival

Two-day enviro-themed festival runs January 4 - 5 in Vaughan, Ontario, featuring a collection of award-winning documentaries, animated films and contributions from the CBC and NFB of Canada – including two films **WHEN** is affiliated with: *Toxic Trespass* and *Exposure*. This event features a marketplace of green vendors and environmental groups. Tickets are \$4 per film - less if you get a day pass, and some films are free. Food on site. Take 160 Bathurst North bus from Wilson station (there is also free parking). Wheelchair access.

[www.city.vaughan.on.ca/community/playhouse/playhouse\\_events.cfm](http://www.city.vaughan.on.ca/community/playhouse/playhouse_events.cfm) 905-882-7469. If you would like to attend as a WHEN volunteer, contact the WHEN office.

### Women's Health Matters Forum & Expo

Considered one of the largest women's health events of the year, Women's Health Matters will be held on Friday, January 18 and Saturday, January 19 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, South building. **WHEN** will be conducting two information-packed workshops, featuring two documentary films – *Toxic Trespass* (Fri. 12:30p.m.) and *Exposure: Environmental Links to Breast Cancer* (Sat. 9:30a.m.). Renowned epidemiologist and keynote speaker Devra Lee Davis, featured in both films, will be a guest speaker at our Saturday workshop, which will be led by environmental health educator Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg.

[www.womenshealthmatters.ca](http://www.womenshealthmatters.ca)

# Taking Action for Prevention

## Bisphenol A: Action Required

by Marie Lorenzo

I work in a residence for women with children. Naturally many of the families include babies. Because it's an institutional setting, they are discouraged from using breakable glass and, for safety reasons, they are not permitted to have heating elements in their room, depending instead on access to a communal kitchen. So women heat their hard plastic baby bottles in the common room microwave to heat their babies' formula. Whenever I tell this to anyone in the know, people are horrified. But of course, it is happening everywhere all the time.

Bisphenol A. Like many other hard-to-pronounce chemicals, industry has long touted its safety. It is used in the lining of some food tins, in hard plastic water bottles, and perhaps most perniciously, in plastic baby bottles. Increasingly, independent reports are substantiating its negative hormone-like properties. For an even longer time, more than a decade, concerned environmentalists have been calling on Health Canada and other government regulators to re-assess industry's claims – for this and many other suspicious chemicals we ingest every day – or, better yet, to take a precautionary approach and simply act *now* on the available evidence.

Synthetic hormones have a long association with both animal and human cancers; bisphenol A (BPA) is considered a xeno-estrogen, a group of chemicals believed to be linked with increases in breast and other cancers. Even in minute amounts, hormones, both natural and synthetic, have a powerful effect on both our reproductive and endocrine systems; developing bodies are even more susceptible. BPA itself has been shown to alter mammary gland development and lower sperm counts in animal trials, even in small doses.

In November the Canadian organization Environmental Defence launched a campaign to raise awareness and demand action on bisphenol A. On November 20, a rally at Queen's Park caused the Ontario government to announce it will do its own independent review –not just sit and wait for the Health Canada review. While that is good news, the Environmental Defence campaign recognizes we may need to move more quickly yet, and is also urging daycares across the country to go bisphenol A-free, due to its high prevalence in canned foods, plastic baby bottles *and* children's sippy cups. Why? It's an age-old adage: better to be safe than sorry. Its modern version is called the precautionary principle. And organizations like Environmental Defence, WHEN and many others have long advocated that regulators and policy makers adopt the precautionary principle as their *modus operandi vis-a-vis* new chemicals coming on the market. Let the onus be on the producers to *prove* safety *before* it is permitted for widespread use.

WHEN supports the Environmental Defence campaign and all who are demanding the elimination of this and other toxic chemicals on the basis of the already weighty evidence of suspicion of harm.

Because, what are we to tell women who are raising their babies at a place such as where I work? They are already pretty stressed out. These issues cannot be left to individuals applying the precautionary principle by making changes in their lifestyle choices. That's always a good place to start, but it would be very unjust to expect that all individuals have equal ability to do so. It is the regulators we expect so much from that must adopt the precautionary principle now. We have been guinea pigs for long enough.

*Taking Action for Prevention is a regular feature where volunteers and friends of WHEN can share their experiences. If you would like to contribute to a future issue, contact us at [office@womenshealthyenvironments.ca](mailto:office@womenshealthyenvironments.ca).*

## Astragalus for Your Health

by Mahalia Freed, ND

### *Astragalus membranaceus*

This Chinese herb is one of my favorites. An ally for a wide range of conditions, it is a tonic and support to the immune system, enhancing our immunity without being overly stimulating. Studies of Astragalus have found that the root extract increases activity and numbers of various white blood cells, the cells that form the foundation of the immune system. It is a central herb in many deep-acting immune formulas, including antiviral formulas, and in contrast to immune stimulants like Echinacea, these tonic formulas may be taken throughout the winter to strengthen the body's innate defenses against colds and flu. Astragalus is equally well known as an adaptogen, meaning that it supports the body in adapting to physical and emotional stress. In fact, Astragalus is a central herb in Change of Season Soup, a herbal formula traditionally taken for a week or two as the weather gets colder (or warmer), as well as in times of stress. Amazing Astragalus is antibacterial as well as antiviral, and it is specifically protective to the lungs, the liver and the heart. Beyond its traditional role in keeping people healthy, uses of this herb range from acute or chronic infection to allergies to adjunct support during cancer treatment. Consult with a Naturopathic Doctor to find the dose and form best for you.

(Please visit Dr. Mahalia Freed's column online at [www.womenshealthyenvironments.ca/naturopath](http://www.womenshealthyenvironments.ca/naturopath).)

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## Ask Dr. Mahalia

If you have questions or topic suggestions, please email Dr. Mahalia Freed at [mahalia@dandelionnaturopathic.ca](mailto:mahalia@dandelionnaturopathic.ca). Look for answers in future newsletter columns and on **WHEN's** website [www.womenshealthyenvironments.ca](http://www.womenshealthyenvironments.ca).