GAME CHANGERS
Economic Policies for a Working America

POLICY BRIEF

Chemicals Without Harm Act

BY JOEL A. TICKNER

JULY 2026

The Problem

Despite its many contributions to economic development and quality of life, the chemical industry and its products have contributed to several planetary crises – toxic pollution, climate destabilization, and plastic waste - imposing heavy costs on taxpayers and governments.

Past Failures

Current laws and policies for chemicals and the chemical industry are a disconnected mix administered across multiple agencies. They have failed to minimize these costs and to drive innovation in safer and sustainable chemicals and materials. The main law governing industrial chemicals production, the Toxics Substances Control Act of 1976, "grandfathered" the vast majority of chemicals already on the market, assuming them safe until demonstrated harmful. The Act, along with its 2016 Lautenburg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act amendments, have failed to address the negative impacts of most chemicals and provide little incentive for innovation in safer and more sustainable alternatives. Current laws have failed to support communities impacted by toxic chemicals or support a transition of the industry and the sectors that depend on it towards sustainability.

Game Changer: The Chemicals Without Harm Act

The Chemicals Without Harm Act (CWHA) launches a coordinated national chemicals strategy to address past and current impacts of the industry and propel its transition towards safer and more sustainable alternatives that will bring good jobs, economic development, and a cleaner environment for all. It addresses the failures of current policy and integrates the most innovative elements of preventive and restorative policies globally. The CHA includes:

POLITICAL ECONOMY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
PERI
University of Massachusetts Amherst

1. **A federal chemicals agency**
   Chemicals and their exposures are currently regulated by more than 20 different laws across multiple federal and state agencies. A federal chemicals agency, modeled after the European and Swedish chemicals agencies, will reduce inefficiencies and conflicts among agencies and serve as the home for chemical assessments, prioritization, and information on safer alternatives, and will promote cooperation across agencies.

2. **A comprehensive chemicals policy**
   A comprehensive chemicals policy will:

   - address all chemicals, including industrial chemicals and pesticides;
   - ensure sufficient information on chemical production, use, and hazards;
   - prioritize and drive actions to restrict the most hazardous chemicals;
   - identify safer chemicals across economic sectors and chemical functions; and
   - incentivize safer, more sustainable chemicals and products.

3. **A Chemical Industry Transition Roadmap**
   A Chemical industry Transition Roadmap will help guide a future safer, innovative, and more just industry by identifying key structural, technological, workforce, and transition needs, setting goals, outlining policy and investment requirements, identifying funding sources, and establishing timelines and responsibilities for the public and private sectors. The roadmap will perform a role for the chemicals industry similar to that of the existing national technology roadmaps for biotechnology, semiconductors, and nanotechnology.

4. **National Remediation Fund**
   The spillover costs of chemicals today are borne primarily by communities, consumers, and governments, not by chemical producers and users. Supplementing the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (Superfund) and funded by fees assessed on toxic chemical production and use indexed by toxicity, the National Remediation Fund would cover the costs of clean-up of hazardous sites and redevelopment, address community and ecosystem impacts, and reimburse health care costs.

5. **National Transition Fund for Safer and Sustainable Chemistry**
   Addressing the wide-ranging impacts of chemicals requires safer and sustainable solutions at scale. Like funds to support the clean energy transition, the National Transition Fund for Safer and Sustainable Chemistry will derisk private investments by supporting R&D, pilot facilities, capital build-outs, and supply chain reformulation. It also will support the retirement of polluting chemical manufacturing assets and just transitions for communities and workers.

Rationale and Feasibility

The spillover costs of chemical production, use, and disposal imposed on workers and communities, and the associated costs of clean up, have been estimated to be as much as $500 billion/year. Meanwhile, efforts to address these impacts and support innovation in safer, more sustainable chemicals and materials remain severely underfunded.

A game-changing strategy will align regulatory programs and industrial policy to reshape the chemicals sector and its products. Europe's Registration, Evaluation, and Authorization of Chemicals (REACH) policy and US state level chemicals policy initiatives have demonstrated that the benefits of a comprehensive policy far exceed the costs. A comprehensive federal policy will

more efficiently address all classes of chemicals, more effectively protect communities, workers, and consumers, and stimulate innovation in safer and more sustainable chemicals. The CWHA will create new jobs and economic opportunities, particularly in the communities most impacted by the industry; secure funding for the transition from industrial taxes and fees on hazardous chemicals as well as targeted public funds; clean up the toxic legacies of past chemical production and use; and provide a healthier and safer environment for all Americans, current and future generations alike.

*For more information on this topic, including the **Background Paper**, please visit our policy page.*

Contacts: Joel Tickner: Joel_Tickner@uml.edu