

Congress sends Obama bill to regulate toxic chemicals

June 8 2016, by Matthew Daly

Congress on Tuesday sent President Barack Obama a sweeping bill that would for the first time regulate tens of thousands of toxic chemicals in everyday products, from household cleaners to clothing and furniture.

In a rare display of bipartisanship in an election year, the Senate backed the measure on a voice vote after Republicans and Democrats spoke enthusiastically about the legislation. Backers of the bill said it would clear up a hodgepodge of state rules and update and improve a toxic-chemicals law that has remained unchanged for 40 years.

The Senate vote follows approval in the House last month. Obama is expected to sign the measure.

The wide-ranging bill was more than three years in the making and had support from a broad coalition, ranging from environmental and public health groups to the [chemical industry](#) and the National Association of Manufacturers.

The bill would set new safety standards for asbestos and other [dangerous chemicals](#), including formaldehyde, styrene and Bisphenol A, better known as BPA, that have gone unregulated for decades. The rules will impact an \$800-billion-a-year industry.

The measure would update the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act to require the Environmental Protection Agency to evaluate new and existing chemicals against a new, risk-based safety standard that includes

considerations for particularly vulnerable people such as children and pregnant women. It also establishes written deadlines for the EPA to act and makes it harder for the industry to claim chemical information is proprietary and therefore secret.

Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., one of the bill's chief sponsors, said the bill's passage ensures that "for the first time in 40 years, the United States of America will have a chemical safety program that works ... and protects families from dangerous chemicals in their daily lives."

The bill is named after the late Sen. Frank Lautenberg, a New Jersey Democrat who worked for years to fix the toxic-substance law before his death in 2013.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, called the bill "historic" and "a great example of the Republican-led Congress working for the American people by enacting meaningful and common-sense legislation."

Some environmental groups opposed the bill, saying it did too little to protect consumers from dangerous chemicals that have been linked to serious illnesses, including cancer, infertility, diabetes and Parkinson's disease. Under current law only a small fraction of chemicals used in consumer goods have been reviewed for safety.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., also opposed the bill, calling it a "sweeping federal takeover of chemical regulation." Paul said the bill would preempt state regulations in favor of "overzealous" federal regulations.

Business groups have been asking Congress to bring clarity to what they say in a dizzying array of state regulations, with tough rules required by liberal-leaning states such as California, Massachusetts and Vermont, and looser standards in conservative states such as Texas and Louisiana.

The American Chemistry Council, which represents the chemical industry, said the bill would provide greater certainty to industry while holding the EPA accountable to impose reasonable requirements.

Final passage of the legislation will "bring chemical regulation into the 21st century ... and have far-reaching benefits for America's economy and public health," the group said a statement.

The chemical bill is "not perfect," but "meets the high goals set by the administration for meaningful reform," the White House said in a statement. The legislation is likely to restore public confidence in the safety of chemicals while improving public health and environmental protections, the White House said.

The 181-page [bill](#) declares that any state law or rule in place before April 22 would not be pre-empted by federal law. The legislation also would allow states to work on some regulations while federal rules are being developed, a process that can take up to seven years.

States that do not regulate chemicals closely would follow the federal standard.

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Citation: Congress sends Obama bill to regulate toxic chemicals (2016, June 8) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-06-congress-obama-bill-toxic-chemicals.html>

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