

June 14, 2013

Assembly Member Bob Wieckowski, Chair
Assembly Judiciary Committee
1020 N Street, Room 104
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 193 - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Monning:

Californians for a Healthy and Green Economy (CHANGE) is pleased to support SB 193, a bill that will allow the Hazard Evaluation System and Information Service (HESIS) in the state's Department of Public Health to fulfill one of its key mandates.

CHANGE is a statewide coalition focused on public health issues related to chemical hazards. We are environmental and environmental justice groups, health organizations, labor advocates, community-based groups, parent organizations, faith groups, and others concerned about the impacts of toxic chemicals on human, environmental, and occupational health.

HESIS is mandated to provide information of practical use to employers, employees, and others about toxic workplace hazards. Its role is to pay attention to those early warning signs -- the canaries -- and warn the rest of us. It has alerted California workers and employers about a variety of these hazards since it was set up after the DBCP scandal of the 1970s.

Our members know all too well about the current limitations of our right-to-know, as workers, employers, and the general public. We count on government agencies like HESIS to warn us of hazards, and tell us what we can or should do to avoid them.

We need those agencies because we have little reliable information to guide us about the hazards of the products we use and buy. Material safety data sheets (MSDSs) are difficult to understand, inconsistent in format and content, and often inaccurate or misleading. We need more trustworthy sources of information about the hazards we face. For example, we are all too aware of the difficulties that HESIS had trying to alert state employers and workers about the hazards of diacetyl, and the horrific consequences for workers exposed to it. So we wonder what it will be able to do about the recent report in the Center for Disease Control's Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report (MMWR) (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6216a3.htm>).

MMWR reported two workers with the disease you heard about in hearings for SB 193 -- obliterated bronchiolitis. However, they were not "popcorn" workers; they were employed in a small coffee processing facility. As the editorial note says in the under-stated tone typical of such recommendations, "These two cases of obliterated bronchiolitis in a coffee-processing facility suggest expansion of the number of workers potentially at risk for flavoring-chemical related disease."

Asian and Pacific Islander Obesity Prevention Alliance * Bayview Hunters Point Community Advocates * Black Women for Wellness * Breast Cancer Action * Breast Cancer Fund * California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative * California Latinas for Reproductive Justice * California Pan-Ethnic Health Network * Californians Against Waste * Californians for Pesticide Reform * Center for Environmental Health * Center for Race, Poverty and Environment * Clean Water Action * Coalition for Clean Air * Commonwealth * Communication Workers of America - District 9 * Communities for a Better Environment * East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice * Environment California * Environmental Working Group * Forward Together (formerly Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice) * Green Schools Initiative * Green Science Policy Institute * Healthy 880 Communities * Healthy Child, Healthy World * Healthy Children Organizing Project * Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California * Just Transition Alliance * Making Our Milk Safe (MOMS) * Movement Strategy Center * Pesticide Action Network North America * Physicians for Social Responsibility - Los Angeles * Science and Environmental Health Network * Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition * United Steel Workers - Local 675 * Worksafe

We believe that HESIS knows about these cases. However, it is impossible for program staff to get the information to specific employers and workers (and their doctors) who need to know about this hazard. Without the authority granted in SB 193 -- to find out where toxics are used in California -- its hands are tied when it comes to effective targeting of important public health messages like this. Without early warnings directed to them, California's workers -- and their employers -- may pay the price, again.

SB 193 would require chemical manufacturers and others in the supply chain to provide the names and addresses of customers who have bought specific toxics, or commercial products containing those chemicals. The bill also ensures that customer lists remain confidential.

This will go a long way to making it possible for HESIS to reach and advise employers about how to protect their workers from the negative health effects of certain toxic chemicals. This includes important information about less toxic alternatives. Workers could take the information to their doctors, so they get appropriate and early treatment if required. HESIS could target those who need to know about the hazard, rather than having to rely on a posting on its website. That well-intentioned, unfocused method means that valuable guidance to prevent disease will reach those in need more by good luck than good management.

HESIS's ability to act quickly and efficiently is vital to protect workers' health and safety. Many of chemicals and products are not tested, so workers usually provide the first public signs of toxic effects. (The consequences are well laid out in the latest report about this from the European Environment Agency, [Late lessons from early warnings: science, precaution, innovation](#), and its earlier report, which include many examples from the United States.

California led the way when it set up HESIS. Now it's time to make sure the program staff can do their job efficiently and effectively.

Please let me know if you have any questions, or there is something else we can do to support this important public health bill.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Alcántar
Campaign Director
Californians for a Healthy & Green Economy
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510-655-3900, x315

cc: Assembly Judiciary Committee Members

May 3, 2013

Senator Bill Monning
State Capitol Room 4066
Sacramento, CA 90301
c/o Kathy.Smith@sen.ca.gov

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www.change-california.org

Contact: Kathryn Alcántar, CHANGE Campaign Director - change-california@gmail.com or 510.655.3900 x315

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