



SILENT SPRING  
INSTITUTE

FALL 2019

# Leading the Way

to a Cancer-Free Future

THANKS TO YOU!

You are powering the research that makes change possible



## Are your kids exposed to dangerous chemicals where they play?

Thank you, donors, for funding the science that will protect our kids!

WHEN JANINE WALSH, owner of Walker's Gymnastics & Dance in Lowell, Mass., found out that the foam cubes in the landing pits at her gym contained hazardous chemicals, she was horrified. After all, the foam cubes are there to protect the children playing and training at her gym—not harm them.

"A light bulb went off in my head," she remembers. "I knew it was something we couldn't ignore."

That unnerving discovery started Janine on an educational journey into the potential dangers of flame retardant chemicals.

She learned that flame retardant chemicals are routinely added to the protective foam used in the pits at gyms. And these chemicals have been associated with a host of frightening health conditions, including thyroid problems, ADHD, weight gain, infertility, and cancers.

And believe it or not, these **harmful flame retardants are also often found in furniture cushions, carpeting and rugs—and even children's toys.**

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Silent Spring Institute's Robin Dodson, research scientist, recently partnered with Courtney Carignan, an epidemiologist at Michigan State University, to investigate how to protect the children who play and train at gyms.

The study—supported in part by the generosity of donors like you—showed that replacing standard foam cubes with flame retardant-free alternatives dramatically reduces exposure to toxic chemicals.

With the help of a community grant from UMass Lowell's Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI), Janine invested in brand-new, toxic-free foam cubes for her landing pits.

It wasn't cheap, and it wasn't easy. "But we could not afford NOT to do it," Janine says. "Because in the end, it's about our children." ♡



### New Silent Spring study shows flame retardants in furniture do NOT improve fire safety

**NOT ONLY** are flame retardant chemicals potentially dangerous to our health, they don't even improve fire safety!

Kathryn Rodgers, a staff scientist, recently led a Silent Spring study analyzing more than 34,000 house fires in Massachusetts. The findings showed that adding flame retardant chemicals to furniture does not protect consumers from the most deadly fires.

There are more effective ways that are also non-toxic to prevent fires, says Rodgers. These include modifying the design of upholstery fabric weave, enacting smoking bans, and installing smoke detectors and sprinkler systems. ♡



### FROM THE DESK OF DR. JULIA BRODY

Executive Director & Senior Scientist

#### If you had plans to fly last March, in the wake of the second Boeing 737 Max 8 plane crash, chances are you were worried.

Many aviation experts believed there was persuasive evidence showing the 737 Max 8 was faulty and insufficient evidence to conclude it was safe. Most countries around the world chose to act on the side of caution and protect their citizens by grounding planes until they could be thoroughly checked.

But not here. The FAA claimed it didn't have enough data to take action and hesitated for three full days before issuing an emergency grounding order.

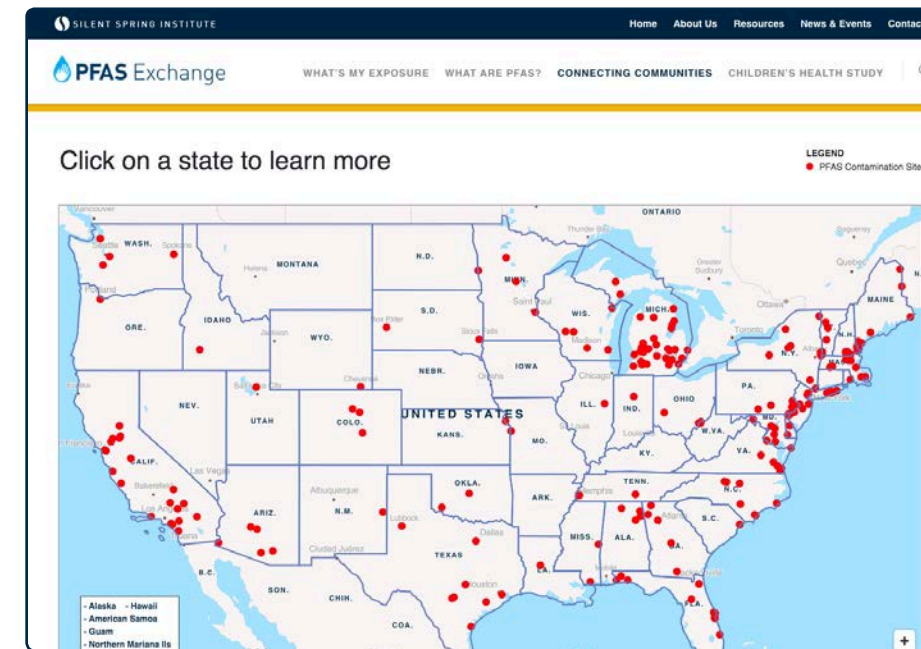
This is an apt metaphor for the way risks from chemicals in consumer products and pollution are handled in the U.S.: *wait to act until there's a mountain of evidence that a chemical will cause harm*. Even when there is credible data showing links between certain chemicals and tragically adverse health outcomes in humans like cancer, asthma, and reproductive disorders.

**But you—our incredibly generous donors—are giving us a fighting chance** by helping us develop scientific evidence that can't be overlooked or ignored. You make it possible for us to have a strong voice in decisions about safety for you and your family—and to help make sure industry and government oversight agencies do the right thing.

**You are the heroes** of the important discoveries happening every day here at Silent Spring Institute. I can't tell you how grateful I am!

*Julia*

## Thank YOU for helping anxious families with nowhere to turn!



### New website offers help to communities affected by contaminated drinking water

You know that feeling when you hear a word or phrase for the first time—and then suddenly it pops up everywhere?

**Like PFAS.** It seems as though there's a new story about PFAS contamination every day. Maybe there's even been one in your own community.

PFAS is an acronym for a class of chemicals that companies add to a variety of consumer products to make them non-stick, waterproof, and stain-resistant. They're also used in firefighting foams for putting out fuel fires.

The risks are significant, including increased cholesterol, low birth weight, immune system effects, cancers, and hormone disruption.

More than 600 sites across the US are contaminated with PFAS—including eight sites right here in Massachusetts—and we're still

identifying more. In many of these cases, PFAS have contaminated public drinking water supplies.

Some researchers estimate that 100 million or more Americans may be drinking contaminated tap water.

In the past, people with reason to suspect they've been exposed to PFAS had nowhere to turn for explanations or guidance.

**But thanks in part to the generosity of donors like you, they now have a place to go for help.**

Silent Spring Institute launched the PFAS Exchange in September at [pfas-exchange.org](https://pfas-exchange.org). It's a free, interactive resource center with interpretation tools to explain the potential danger of your exposure, information on tap water testing, and educational materials on PFAS chemicals.

#### Putting the data on the map

One of the Exchange's most innovative features is an interactive map of the US that allows visitors to click on any state to see the locations of identified contamination sites—and to learn whether there are any nearby.

The Exchange even provides guidance and education to medical professionals, who often don't know how to talk to their patients about their exposure.

In 2014, **Andrea Amico discovered that her husband and small children had been exposed** to PFAS-contaminated drinking water at the Pease Tradeport in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

She remembers how lost and powerless she felt, trying to figure out what it meant and where to go for help. "It was such an upsetting, complicated issue, and there was no clear-cut guidance.

"The Exchange will be a great place for people to come and get all the information they need to take action," says Andrea, who co-founded the grassroots group Testing for Pease, one of our community partners. ♡

## » Major milestone in cancer research thanks to your help!

**The American Association for Cancer Research (AACR)** is the largest cancer research professional organization in the world. Yet it has never focused on environmental chemicals as triggers of cancer.

That is, **until this year.**

This past June, AACR hosted its first international scientific

meeting focused on the environmental causes of cancer—and how to prevent cancers by reducing exposures to harmful chemicals.

Identifying and preventing environmental causes of cancer and other diseases has been the work of Silent Spring since we opened our doors 25 years ago. AACR's first-ever conference on cancer's

environmental causes shows we're making progress!

"It's a milestone that AACR was willing to play that role," says Dr. Julia Brody. "It shows what a long way we've come since the beginning of Silent Spring Institute."

**Donors—you are making a critically important contribution to human health! Thank you. ♡**

## SHE NEEDS YOUR HELP!



### Flame retardants in college furniture can make students sick

**IF YOU'VE ALREADY READ** this newsletter's cover article, we hope you are feeling very proud for helping to protect young gymnasts from hazardous flame retardant chemicals at their gyms.

Now we urgently need **your help to make college students safer** from the same toxic chemicals found in furniture on college campuses—chemicals that have been linked with a host of health problems, including cancer.

Our research scientists have undertaken a major study to find out how best to protect students from toxic chemicals in campus furniture. We've already collected dust samples from four campus partners and tested the samples for flame retardants.

**YES!** I want to keep college students safe from toxic chemicals that can make them sick.

Please use my gift to help get Silent Spring's urgent findings about toxic flame retardants on college campuses to policymakers and regulatory agencies as soon as possible!

Here is my gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

Return this coupon with your donation to:  
Silent Spring Institute  
320 Nevada Street, Suite 302  
Newton, MA 02460

Or give at: [silentspring.org/donate](https://silentspring.org/donate)

**But we need your help** to fund the analysis of the data to determine the safest flammability standards for college furniture. And we need your support to publish and distribute our findings—so that they can be used to influence policymakers and develop new, safer regulations nationwide.

It may not sound glamorous to donate to support analysis, writing, and publishing activities, but please believe us—it's the most important thing you can do today! ♡