



## **States as Laboratories for Federal Policies: The SAFER Campaign**

Created in 2005 with support from Beldon and the John Merck Fund, the State Alliance for Federal Reform of Chemical Policy (SAFER), a project of the Washington Toxics Coalition, is a multi-state collaboration that transformed a previously fragmented environmental health advocacy community into a powerful engine for change with growing national clout.

### **Coordinated State Campaigns**

Co-directed by the Washington Toxics Coalition and the Maine Environmental Health Strategy Center, SAFER began with a theory that success on the state level could build momentum for federal policy reform. The results to date support this premise. Advocacy groups in eight states\* have developed a common policy agenda and coordinated campaigns to ban the use of harmful chemicals in consumer products. The coalition has facilitated sharing of research, communications resources, and winning strategies. And it has reached outside the traditional environmental community to engage allies from highly respected professions - particularly firefighters and nurses - who have been powerful messengers on some of the state campaigns.

### **SAFER's Policy Victories**

Washington became the first state to pass a bill to phase out the use of the toxic flame retardant PBDE and subsequently banned several chemical toxins in children's toys. Maine has restricted the use of flame retardants and several other toxic substances. California banned the use of a toxic dye in toys and passed a bill requiring disclosure of chemicals in cosmetics. Similar bills are pending in other SAFER states. In addition, the state campaigns have mobilized public concern and attracted widespread media coverage of the issues.

### **Paving the Way for National Policy Change**

These successes have increased the clout of state-based groups, gotten the attention of national environmental organizations and policy makers, and helped pave the way for a federal ban on lead and phthalates found in toys and other children's products. With national organizations now eager to join forces with SAFER, advocates are well-positioned to scale up this work through a national campaign for comprehensive chemical policy reform.

Reflecting on SAFER's role, Gregg Small - former executive director of the Washington Toxics Coalition - noted: "Previously there was no national coordination among the state-based toxic chemical reform groups. We came to recognize that we couldn't be effective if we didn't organize and develop joint strategies. The SAFER campaign reflects the recognition that we have to change chemical policies at the federal level - this is the long-term goal - and that given where federal policies were at the time, we needed to start in the states."

\*Maine, Washington, Michigan, Minnesota, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York