

24 hours

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> PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Lindsay's big day?



Lindsay Lohan could be headed down the aisle. Her boyfriend is reported to have bought a ring. P. 2

> NEWS

More soldiers killed



Five Canadian soldiers killed on the weekend in Afghanistan were honoured by their military comrades. P. 8

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Our toxic time bomb

Chemical cocktails may put future generations at risk: **Full story, P. 4, 5**



- Rafal Gerszak, 24 hours

How toxic are you? Vancouver Fairview MLA Gregor Robertson and his family were shocked to find out just how many environmental toxins were present in his wife Amy, and their kids, Johanna and Satchel. All week, *24 hours* investigates how persistent toxins may affect your health and the environment. P. 4, 5.

toxic time bomb

chemical BREAKDOWN

Out of the 68 chemicals tested for, here's what showed up in the Robertson's blood samples (some chemicals are disruptive to more than one biological system):



AMY ROBERTSON
(mom)

- Carcinogens: 24
- Hormone disruptors: 18
- Respiratory toxins: 10
- Reproductive/developmental toxins: 25
- Neurotoxins: 13
- Other (no data on health effects): 2



JOHANNA ROBERTSON
(daughter)

- Carcinogens: 26
- Hormone disruptors: 19
- Respiratory toxins: 7
- Reproductive/developmental toxins: 27
- Neurotoxins: 15
- Other (no data on health effects): 2



SATCHEL ROBERTSON
(son)

- Carcinogens: 24
- Hormone disruptors: 16
- Respiratory toxins: 8
- Reproductive/developmental toxins: 25
- Neurotoxins: 13
- Other (no data on health effects): 2

In the last 50 years, science has invented thousands of chemicals meant everything from withstanding fire, resisting stains and keeping your bread eggs from sticking to the pan. But what makes your life easier now may be making your life shorter – made to be indestructible, these chemicals are showing up in alarming numbers in our own bodies, and wreaking havoc on key biological systems.

This week in a four-part series, *24 hours* investigates Canada's toxic conundrum.

- Robyn Stubbs

Toxic nation, toxic families

For some, ignorance is bliss. But a small group of Canadians swallowed their fears and had their blood tested to find out just how many environmental toxins are flowing through their veins.

The study, conducted on behalf of the national environmental group Environmental Defence, looked for specific chemicals in 11 adults across the country last year, and more recently, tested parents and children in five Canadian families.

Amy Robertson and her kids, Johanna, 15, and Satchel, 13, were the lucky family from Vancouver to roll up their sleeves for the test, hoping their healthy lifestyle would have spared them a few of the pollutants – the kids grew up on an organic farm in the Fraser Valley and lived for a time on Cortez Island before settling in Vancouver last year.

But they would have no such luck. Thirty-one pollutants out of 68 were detected in Amy's blood. Her daughter Johanna showed 32 in her sample, and her son, Satchel was polluted with 29 out of the 68 – the second-highest level detected in a child in the study.

"I was pretty shocked. We sat down and had a weeping session after the results came in, but we



- Rafal Gerszak

Amy Robertson and her kids, Johanna, 15, and Satchel, 13, were the lucky family from Vancouver to roll up their sleeves and have their blood tested to find out just how many environmental toxins are flowing through their veins.

need to speak out on this issue because it's only getting worse," Amy told *24 hours*.

Of particular concern: Although the industrial chemicals known as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were banned in Canada nearly 15 years before Johanna and Satchel were born, both the Robertson kids had PCB levels higher than their mom, and were contaminated with PCBs that weren't present in Amy at all.

"What we found is that most people had most of the pollutants we tested for and in most cases, the kids had higher levels than their parents, which is surprising and incredibly worrisome," says Rick Smith, executive director of Environ-

mental Defence.

"These chemicals are everywhere that are in products in your kitchen, our upholstery, and in the air – when people are talking about pollution, they're still talking about Victoria pumping raw sewage into the water or smokestacks pumping black smoke into the air. The reality is that it's much more insidious, it's a hidden problem."

Environmental Defence has also taken blood from other people in the environment critic John O'Brien. Environment Minister Stephen Ambrose, Health Minister Clement and NDP leader Layton to test for 102 toxic chemicals. Those results will be available at www.toxicnation.ca in the next few weeks.

- Robyn Stubbs

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toxic time bomb

The hidden enemy

Cancer: An evil influence or corruption spreading uncontrollably.

- Oxford Canadian Dictionary

For its victims, cancer can feel like an evil presence invading their most personal and private space – the body.

And while genetic makeup, individual immune systems, viruses, age and lifestyle choices are all associated with causing cancer, the role of exposure to environmental toxins can't be ignored or downplayed, says Mae Burrows, executive director of the Labour Environmental Alliance Society, a non-profit organization based in Vancouver.

"It's that low dose exposure to toxins over a period of time that we need to be more aware of," she says. "We accept that when it comes to tobacco smoke ... we should be saying that about other products as well."

The Canadian Cancer Society estimates approximately five per cent of

cancers are related to environmental and occupational carcinogen exposure, and while determining what causes cancer is complex, current scientific evidence suggests people continually exposed to known or potential environmental carcinogens have a higher risk of developing the disease.

"It's usually a number of exposures over time, and there are some [environmental toxins] that are more clearly related to cancer, like asbestos," says Cathy Adair, vice-president of the Canadian Cancer Society.

But it's not only asbestos that is now undeniably linked to cancer – the Ontario College of Family Physicians has done extensive research in the field of environmental toxins and has determined clear associations between exposure to toxic chemicals, commonly used pesticides and cancer of the brain, liver,



- Photo courtesy of the Canadian Cancer Society.

A researcher in the lab works on finding cures for cancer.

prostate, kidney and pancreas, as well as Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and leukemia.

But, whether they're sprayed on your lawn or in your living room on a stain-resistant sofa treated with fire retardant, toxins wiggle their way into your system in every way possible, including being inhaled through everyday household dust or absorbed through the skin on contact, says Jan Kasperski, CEO of the OCFP.

And not surprisingly, kids are at the most risk for

developing illnesses related to toxins that can either cause cancer or interfere with developing hormonal, immune or endocrine systems.

"[Kids] have poorly developed kidneys and livers, so toxins that adults may swiftly eliminate from their systems, kids will contain for a much longer period of time," he says. "And, we simply have so many more toxins now, so over the course of a lifetime, children are more and more exposed."

- Robyn Stubbs, 24 hours

Cancer: The economic machine

Billions of dollars are poured into cancer research each year, and while significant progress is being made, there still seems to be no end in sight to the war on cancer. For some, the answer is not clear:

"You make a lot of money

causing cancer [and] producing pharmaceuticals that don't cure cancer, but maintain people and cancer. It's one of the biggest industries in the country," says Mae Burrows, executive director of the Labour Environmental Alliance Society.

But Burrows isn't the first or only one to call out the cancer establishment – Samuel Epstein of the Cancer Prevention Coalition in the U.S. has voiced similar criticisms since his first book, *The Politics of Cancer*, hit shelves in 1978.

In his latest book, *Cancer-*

Gate: How to Win the Losing Cancer War, Epstein argues the medical field is losing an easily won war because cancer-fighting institutions are pouring billions into treatment and virtually nothing into prevention.

- Robyn Stubbs, 24 hours

From crustaceans to salmon to killer whales, toxic chemicals and persistent organic pollutants are found at every level of the marine food chain. Find out more in tomorrow's 24 hours.

little BITS

■ Environmental exposure is now responsible for one quarter of global disease, according to a recent report released by the World Health Organization.

The report, entitled *Preventing Disease Through Healthy Environments*, estimates more than 13 million deaths annually – including 1.4 million cancer-related deaths – are due to preventable environmental causes.

■ According to Environmental Defence's *Toxic Nations* report, industry in Canada released nearly 18 million kg of carcinogens, 14 million kg of hormone disruptors, 4.3 billion kg of respiratory toxins and more than 1 billion kg of reproductive/developmental toxicants into the environment in 2003 alone.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2006 CANADIAN CANCER STATISTICS REPORT (www.cancer.ca):

■ An estimated 153,100 new cases of cancer and 70,400 deaths from cancer will occur in Canada in 2006. About 1,300 Canadian children develop cancer each year.

■ Cancer incidence and mortality rates are higher in females than males during the reproductive years although males have higher rates at all other stages of life.

■ On the basis of current incidence rates, 38% of Canadian women and 44% of men will develop cancer during their lifetimes. Approximately one out of every four Canadians will die from cancer.

■ Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma incidence and mortality rates continue to rise this year. In 2001, Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, which has been linked to chemicals used in pesticides, was the fifth most common cancer for both men and women. Incidence rates then had doubled since 1973, and the increasing incidence trend was also most pronounced among young adults.

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