



Erie County Flushes Out PBTs

In order to eliminate workplace exposure to harmful para-dichlorobenzene vapors and the release of this persistent, bioaccumulative toxin (PBT) into the environment, Erie County, New York, has switched to safer urinal blocks.

Para-dichlorobenzene (para) is classified as a possible human carcinogen and can cause symptoms such as chest pain and poor coordination when workers breathe large amounts of the deodorant vapors. It can also contaminate water supplies when flushed into the sewer system. According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, para has been detected in 13% of drinking water samples from US surface waters and in trout caught in the Great Lakes.

Para-containing urinal blocks were the first products targeted under a new program designed to identify and phase out Erie County's purchase of products that contain or generate PBTs, explained Environmental Project Manager Bonnie Lawrence. The county began with a pilot project to test several non-para deodorant blocks identified and evaluated by INFORM. Ultimately, the county tested two sulfonated products made by Puro and Impact and one enzyme-based product made by Nilodor. It then recruited several of its departments to test the products in restrooms in heavily trafficked areas, including an office building, a downtown library, and an enclosed park pavilion. Finally, the county evaluated the impact of completely eliminating urinal blocks from the restroom facilities at a campground.

According to the pilot project participants, two of the para-free products performed well, while one showed mixed results. The latter was attributed to a "bad batch," which the vendor replaced with fresh product. Overall, the participants were satisfied. According to Matt Bravo, a laborer at the library, "The non-toxic products actually make the job easier, as well as safer. The eight-ounce enzyme-based blocks last almost three times as long as the old product. Plus, the deodorant blocks are already in screens, which is much more convenient." At the campground, the facility manager has decided to stop using urinal blocks altogether.

The county's janitorial contract was rebid this fall and now offers only non-para products. Although the PBT-free deodorizers cost about \$10 more per dozen, this increase is minimal given the longer life of the enzyme-based blocks and the county's overall facility operational budget. "It's a no-brainer," says Chief Custodian of Buildings and Grounds Joe Lettieri. "The para blocks are toxic and we don't want to work with them."

Based on purchases from the previous year, the county estimates it prevented approximately one ton of para-containing products from entering the environment. Erie County is now planning to help local schools and towns make the same change.

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