

**Testimony of
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Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and members of the committee. My name is David Schultz and I am a Health and Safety Advocate for the Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health (ConnectiCOSH). I am testifying in favor of House Bill 5702 an Act concerning Safer Workplaces.

Every year tens of thousands of people die due to occupational illness. In addition many more become disabled or find their lives changed dramatically because of illnesses.

Many of you already know the examples of more than 200 workers at Pratt Whitney who have died of a rare brain cancer who worked with dangerous paints, solvents and cleaning chemicals. What would it have meant to the families of these victims if Connecticut businesses had chosen to use the precautionary principle years ago.

To protect workers and have safe workplaces in CT, we need to reduce toxic chemicals wherever there are safer alternatives.

Misuse of known toxics have had devastating health and economic effects, such as asbestos, lead, PCB's, urea formaldehyde foam insulation—our economy and workers would have been much better off if we had reduced or eliminated their use when we first knew of the hazards.

We need to increase workplace safety, and we also need to preserve jobs and develop new employment. With the global marketplace changing, as the European Union passes laws that phase out and restrict toxic substances, CT jobs and businesses will be at risk if we stay with toxic substances. Our businesses and workplaces need to make the transition to using safe materials and safe processes.

Why should workers in this country be left behind? In Europe with the passage of REACH, 1500 hazardous chemicals are being phased out. Workers in Europe will no longer be exposed to these chemicals. Why should we in this country be exposed to them? It's bad for the workers. And it will be bad for businesses who attempt to trade with European nations and find they can no longer send products with these chemicals.

The infrastructure of 5,000 health and safety committees in businesses with 25 employees or more are a means of cost-effectively implementing new technologies and innovative solutions. We can build on this important structure to help train workers provide support to businesses as we move towards reducing the toxics in our workplaces and our environment.

UConn can provide the perfect place for such an innovation institute. UConn has been effective in working with businesses and workers on health and safety issues. They have an excellent track record with workers and unions. They understand the full range of issues affecting workers, and they take a comprehensive approach. They provide training and ongoing support to help improve the health and safety of CT workplaces. We would like to see them facilitate the creation of an institute that would help businesses and workers make the transition to safer materials and products.

Why shouldn't the U.S. take leadership in caring for its workers? We have a long way to go. OSHA has almost the same policy regarding chemicals that it had in 1972 during its formation. During the past 35 years, only 28 new chemicals have been added to the list of regulated chemicals. While hundreds of new chemicals are being manufactured yearly, our safety controls operate based on the research that was conducted in the late 1960's. Our workers deserve better than this.

ConnectiCOSH was instrumental in passing the state's Right to Know law that helped to forge the way for national hazard communication protection. The right to know law communicates the hazards of the chemicals that we work with. But we need more than that. It would be a cruel irony to say that we are concerned enough as a state to make sure that workers are aware of the hazardous chemicals that they work with, but we aren't so concerned as to evolve towards protecting our workers from their use in the first place.

Please support the passage of House bill 5702 so that we can begin our work in that direction.