



In the Spotlight

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***Mind, Disrupted* Project Focuses on Learning and Developmental Disabilities Community**

“When you have 92% of the American population exposed to a chemical, this is not one where you want to be wrong. Are we going to quibble over individual rodent studies, or are we going to act?”

Ted Schettler, MD, MPH, Science Director for the Science and Environmental Health Network

Stephen Boese, Executive Director of the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State, recently participated in a national biomonitoring project, which was the first such study to specifically target the learning and developmental disabilities community. With increasing rates of autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other learning and developmental disabilities, there is growing concern that the increase in these disabilities may be due, at least in some part, to exposure to toxic chemicals that are prevalent in our environment. To shed light on how pervasive these chemicals actually are in our environment, how easily they accumulate in the human body even through passive exposure and to prompt action to reduce exposures,

In *Mind, Disrupted*, a recently conducted biomonitoring project, twelve leaders and self-advocates from the learning and developmental disabilities community were tested for the presence synthetic and heavy metals known or suspected to be neurotoxicants, hazardous to nerve cells or endocrine disruptors with the potential to harm normal hormone functioning. These included bisphenol A (BPA), pesticides, flame retardants, lead, mercury and others. Sixty-one distinct chemicals were detected to varying degrees in the participants. All participants were found to have levels of BPA, mercury, lead, PBDE's (flame retardant), perfluorinated compounds (PFCs), perchlorate and organochlorine pesticides.

Three of the participants in the study are from the Learning Disabilities Association community including: Stephen Boese, Executive Director of LDA of NYS, Maureen Swanson, Coordinator of the Healthy Children Project at LDA of America and Dr. Larry Silver, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, Georgetown University Medical Center; former Acting Director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH); and Past President of the Learning Disabilities Association of America.

This is the first time a biomonitoring project specifically targeted the Learning and Developmental Disabilities community. According to Dr. Ted Schettler, MD,

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The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State (LDANYS) was chartered by the New York State Board of Regents in 1958 and is a statewide 501c3 nonprofit, parent-driven organization that advocates on behalf of children and adults who have learning disabilities. LDANYS is the New York state affiliate of the Learning Disabilities Association of America. Our regional affiliates located throughout the state provide a variety of programs and services for children and adults with learning and other developmental disabilities and their families.

For more information about our organization or about the content contained here, please contact our state office at 518-608-8992.

***Mind, Disrupted* – continued**

MPH, Science Director for the Science and Environmental Health Network, "The overwhelming evidence shows that certain environmental exposures can contribute to lifelong learning and developmental disorders" and that "we should eliminate children's exposures to substances that we know can have these impacts by implementing stronger health-based policies requiring safer alternatives. Furthermore, we must urgently examine other environmental contaminants of concern for which safety data are lacking."

The United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) NHANES biomonitoring study indicates that most Americans carry a body burden of environmental chemicals in their bodies. These chemical body burdens are unnecessary, preventable, and may potentially be harmful. An updated federal law could result in lowered toxic chemical body burdens, as was demonstrated by biomonitoring studies after lead was better regulated in the United States and PBDEs were banned in Sweden.

The goal of this project was to present the results of these biomonitoring findings and highlight the participants' experiences and feelings about their participation and test results in an effort to prompt actions (particularly the modernization of the Toxic Substance Control Act which hasn't been updated since it was first passed in 1976) toward reducing exposures for all.

There has been some question as to how much science can "prove" a definitive connection between exposure to environmental toxicants such as those targeted in this study and the prevalence of learning and developmental disabilities. Dr. Ted Schettler said it best when quoted in a recent New York Times article on BPA. "When you have 92% of the American population exposed to a chemical, this is not one where you want to be wrong. Are we going to quibble over individual rodent studies, or are we going to act?" To read more about the *Mind, Disrupted* project, visit www.minddisrupted.org.