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FEBRUARY 2009

IS YOUR  
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POLLUTED?

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DOG BREEDER  
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**FLIP  
OVER**  
FOR NATURAL DOG

# Polluted pets

Are chemical

contaminants

harming

your dog?

Chemicals from pesticides may enter your dog's body when he lies in the grass then licks his paws or coat.

**W**hen Sasha, a 10-year-old yellow Labrador Retriever, developed cancerous lumps in her chest, her owner began searching the Internet to determine the cause. What Chris Cameron of Draper, Utah, found was a study released by the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit Washington-based research and advocacy organization that said dogs were polluted with 2.4 times more chemical contaminants than people.

"I couldn't believe it and wondered if that's why Sasha had cancer," Cameron says. "I'm not an expert, but it seems logical that if dogs are exposed to chemicals, it could cause health problems at some point in their life."

BY  
CATHY M.  
ROSENTHAL

After years of studying the impacts of chemical exposures in adults and children, EWG last year released the first-ever study on industrial chemicals found in man's best friend. By testing blood and urine, researchers found dogs were contaminated with 48 of 70 industrial chemicals commonly found in homes and outdoor environments, including 43 chemicals at higher levels than those found in people.

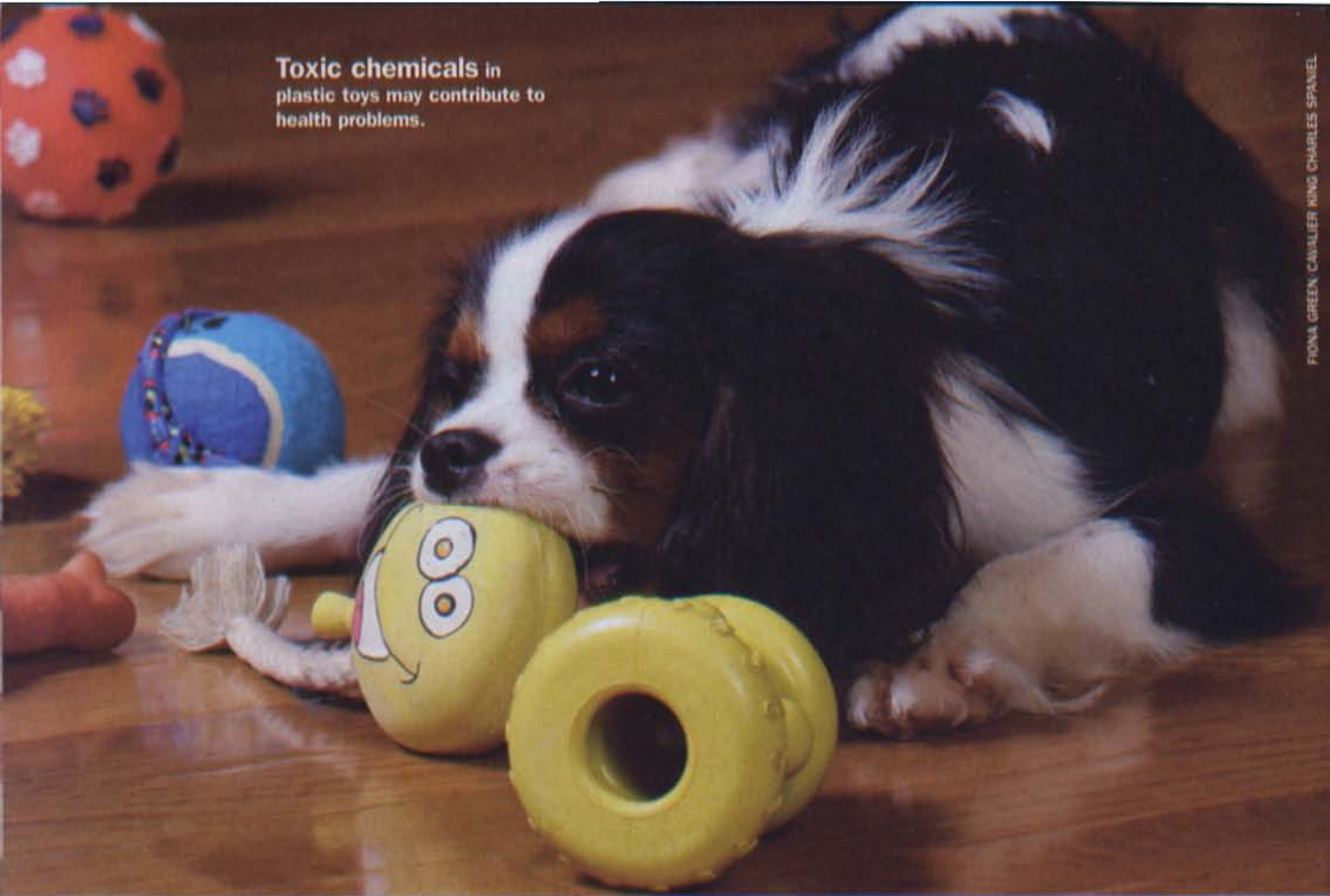
"The study results were alarming," says Carrie Gouldin, project leader for EWG's Pets for the Environment program. "We learned that dogs carry toxic chemicals at much higher levels than we ever expected."

Relative to people, EWG's study (you can find the report at



**Everything from the water your dog drinks to the materials used to make his bowl presents opportunities for him to ingest harmful chemicals.**

**Toxic chemicals in plastic toys may contribute to health problems.**



FIONA GREEN - CAVALIER KING CHARLES SPANIEL

[www.ewg.org/reports/pets](http://www.ewg.org/reports/pets)) showed that dogs had higher levels of:

- Stain- and grease-proof chemicals (Teflon), which can be found in some dog food bag linings, in house dust, and in stain-resistant furniture, dog beds, and carpet. These chemicals can disrupt fetal and neonatal development, interfere with reproductive and thyroid hormones, affect immune and liver function, increase blood cholesterol levels, and potentially increase the risk of chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

- Plastic softeners called phthalates, from

### Dogs at higher risk

How do these chemicals get into our dogs? According to the report, "Just as children ingest pollutants in tap water, play on lawns with pesticide residues, or breathe in an array of indoor air contaminants, so do pets."

But dogs are even more vulnerable than people. Because they have compressed life spans and age seven times faster than humans, experts say they develop health problems from chemical exposures more rapidly than people. Their proximity to the ground means they are in close contact with pesticide-treated lawns and flame-retardant

exposures to overall canine health problems, like Sasha's cancer. EWG cited other scientific literature that showed dogs can develop lung cancer from being exposed to asbestos fibers; bladder cancer from living near industrial areas and exposure to lawn products; and malignant lymphomas from exposure to chipping lead-based paint. In fact, cancer is now the second leading cause of death for dogs, according to the Purdue University Department of Veterinary Pathobiology. Additionally, a Texas A&M study says that dogs have 35 times more skin cancer, four times more breast cancer, and twice the incidence of leukemia than people.

"Sadly, our pets may be serving as involuntary sentinels showing us the widespread connection between human health problems and chemical exposures," Gouldin says.

### Solutions and protection

The alarming presence of chemicals in our dogs might be the wake-up call needed for stronger safety measures for pet products. In 2007, the widespread pet food recall brought to the nation's attention the need for better oversight of safety regulations regarding ingredients and additives in commercial food. Under current federal law though, the same lax oversight also applies

**'Researchers found dogs were contaminated with 48 of 70 industrial chemicals commonly found in homes and outdoor environments.'**

plastic dog toys, some veterinary medicines, shampoos, and other consumer products. These chemicals can cause reproductive damage, birth defects, and cancer.

- Fire retardants in pet clothing, bedding, and foam furniture produced before 2005. These chemicals can alter thyroid function and pose a risk to brain development.

carpets, furniture, and dog beds. They groom themselves, ingesting contaminants on their fur, and they may chew on stain-resistant treated furniture. They also may play with soft plastic toys and drink from plastic bowls, both of which can leach dangerous chemicals.

Cameron was right to link these chemical



PAWPRINCESSTUDIOS.COM/AUSTRALIAN SHEPHERD PUPPY

**Many owners give their dogs bottled water to try to reduce chemical intake.**

to pet products, according to EWG. "Chemical companies simply don't have to prove chemicals are safe before they are used in pet products, including pet toys," Gouldin says.

Until laws are changed, pet owners need to be vigilant. Laura Just of Washington says her 6-year-old mixed breed Eddie (now a spokesdog for the Pets for the Environment project) loved to play with plastic squeaky toys. "Now that I know about the dangers of plastic softeners, I buy him fabric toys to chew on," she says.

Ella, a 6-year-old Rhodesian Ridgeback, doesn't have a health problem now, but her owner, Mary Keisaw of Winthrop, Wash., isn't taking any chances.

"When I first read the report, all I could see was Ella licking her bed over and over again," Keisaw says. "She's an incessant licker, so I switched to a bed that didn't say 'water-repellent' or 'stain-resistant,' because I now know those added chemicals are a health risk to her."

Although making changes now won't cure Sasha's cancerous lumps, Cameron says she has taken steps to reduce chemical exposure for her 1-year-old Yorkie Tikka. "I have replaced the plastic bowls with glass," she says.

"But frankly, I still worry about food safety. They eat the same food every day, so if there is a problem in the food, then that would certainly build up fairly quickly."

EWG says pet owners should choose pet foods without the chemical preservatives BHA, BHT, and ethoxyquin, as well as choose organic or free-range ingredients rather than byproducts. Because some pet-food packaging may contain non-stick, grease-proof chemicals in the lining, pet owners also should ask manufacturers how the pet food is produced and packaged.

"This information should be publicly available to allow consumers to make their own independent choices and protect the health of their pets," Gouldin says.

Owners may be glad to know that the American Pet Products Association meets regularly with the Consumer Product Safety Commission for guidance, and offers standards and direction to pet product manufacturers.

Although the commission doesn't have a division for animal safety, the information it provides to APPA about human products enables the organization to keep pet product manufacturers "aware of what's going on," says Bob Vetere, APPA president. "That's because much of what is in the [EWG] report is true on the human side, too."

Vetere says that while the information in the EWG report is "enough to make you scratch your head and think," he cautions that it may not be "diligently and scientifically validated yet.

"It indicates possibilities rather than scientific absolutes," he says. "Pets as a humanized phenomenon is relatively new, and there need to be more studies and analysis done, as is currently done with human products."

Although it's disturbing to hear that dogs carry more chemical toxins in their bloodstream than people, pet owners can make small changes in their pet's environment to reduce exposure and, hopefully, help ward off future health problems.

*Cathy M. Rosenthal is a freelance writer with more than 20 years of experience in the animal-welfare field. She writes a pet advice column for the San Antonio Express-News and shares her home with two dogs, Brinkley and Maggie.*

Find out how to reduce your dog's  
exposure to harmful chemicals at  
[DogChannel.com/extras](http://DogChannel.com/extras)

# Think your town could be the next DogTown USA®?

Tell us why your favorite town ranks as a great place for dogs. DOG FANCY will announce the next DogTown in Fall 2009.

## Nominate DOG FANCY's DogTown USA® 2009

Please remove or copy this form, fill it out, and mail it to DogTown USA, DOG FANCY, P.O. Box 6050, Mission Viejo, CA 92690-6050, or visit [DogChannel.com/dogtown](http://DogChannel.com/dogtown) for a downloadable entry form.

**Entries must be received by March 3, 2009**

Print your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, state, zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**The city you nominate for DogTown USA 2009:**

What makes this town special for dogs?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Does this city have:**

Leash laws?  Yes  No

Activities for dogs?  Yes  No

Dog-licensing program?  Yes  No

Dog park or off-leash areas?  Yes  No

Humane society or SPCA shelter?  Yes  No

Pet-friendly businesses or hotels?  Yes  No

24-hour emergency veterinary clinic within 30 miles?

Yes  No

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