



## AN ACTIVITY TO MAKE ONE THINK

At this Network, the members of the Status of Women Committee welcomed the activists with an activity aimed at making them realize just to what extent our environment can be contaminated by various toxic substances. Whether in our food, beauty products, medications or cleaning products, they are present everywhere in our homes, our cars, and also in our work environment.

Thus, on the tables were the name of a toxic substance with pictures and the activists had to talk about that substance and say in which product it is found. Some connections seemed obvious, like PTFE, commonly known as “Teflon”, found in non-stick cookware or in dental floss, lead found in paint, mercury found in fish, batteries and some vaccines or DDT, a pesticide found more specifically in strawberries, grapes and cucumbers, while others were less obvious.

As you can see, we are bombarded every day by these different substances with harmful effects on the human body because of their teratogenic, carcinogenic, mutagenic effects, in addition to reducing fertility by playing on hormones and I could go on. We could feel overwhelmed or frightened by such

awareness, but it is important to know these substances in order to make enlightened choices when we are buying products. It is important to minimize these toxic substances in our environment as much as possible.

And, this shows the importance of acting to make changes, whether it is signing petitions or boycotting certain companies or making representations with the government. Our future, and that of our children, depends on it.

We are an industrialized nation, we have made significant technological change, but at what price? ■

*By Patricia Lajoie, member of the Status of Women Committee*



The members of the Status of Women Committee, from left to right: Marie-Ève Bertrand, Line Mercier, Patricia Lajoie, Caroline Flageol, Véronique Foisy and Claire Alarie

### THE NETWORK IN A NUTSHELL

This bulletin is intended as a summary of the Women's Network meeting with the theme “Femmes et environnement” (Women and the environment) held on November 9 and 10, 2011.

The welcome workshop allowed the activists of the network to further their reflection and their knowledge of the toxic substances present in the environment, both at work and at home. The two invited guest speakers, Fiona Hanley, Professor at Dawson College, and Lise Parent, Professor at UQAM, presented some very interesting information on this subject.

The film “Homo Toxicus” was also presented. Tons of toxic substances, present everywhere, are left like a free electron in the environment. The question must be asked, do we know enough about the long-term effects of these products? Lastly, the books “Full sexuel” and “Remous, ressacs et dérivations autour de la troisième vague féministe” were presented.

# NEWS FROM THE STATUS OF WOMEN SECTOR



## 12 days of action to eliminate violence against women

As is the case every year, the campaign, "12 days of action to eliminate violence against women", took place throughout Quebec from November 25 to December 6, 2011.

This year, the campaign's goal was to raise wider public awareness on the theme "Violence against women continues to exist because...". The *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ) wanted to highlight the individual and collective responsibility that we all have, to make violence against women stop. In fact, too many people continue to justify this violence, think it is a thing of the past or that it only concerns a limited number of women. Yet, violence against women continues to persist nevertheless!

The 12 Days of Action Committee produced a video clip on the different factors, which, still in 2011, perpetuate the violence against women. This clip was launched on November 25 on the FFQ website.

The FFQ published an announcement in the main newspapers just like in previous years to reiterate that violence is unacceptable. The ad invited readers to watch the video clip, to discuss it with the people around them, to propose solutions and...to take action!

A gathering took place at 12 noon on December 6, in front of the Montreal courthouse, to denounce violence against women and to commemorate the Polytechnique victims. ■

Source: FFQ

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY - MARCH 8

The women's movement is always in action and mobilized. The theme for March 8, 2012 evokes a wave of indignation in economic, democratic and domestic terms: "Feminism? Now more than ever! Women have every reason to be incensed" ■

## NO TO RE-OPENING THE DEBATE ON ABORTION

It is crucial to remember that the Conservative Party MPs have presented no less than five private members' bills since 2006 on reopening the debate on abortion. Because the Conservatives now have a majority, a free vote on a private member's bill could result in its passing into law even if the prime minister does not want to reopen the debate, which is very disturbing. The FIQ is against any moves aimed at reopening the debate. It is a question of health and respect for women's autonomy.

## MNA CLAUDE PINARD

The FIQ Status of Women Sector cannot ignore the words of Claude Pinard, MNA, on women in politics which clearly demonstrate that equality is still far from being a reality. When, in 2011, an MNA openly says that a woman in politics is a "serious handicap" (Pauline Marois) and that she "cannot rally as much support as a man", we are far from having equality be a reality. The struggle must go on in order to denounce the inequalities and to advance the rights of women in all areas.

## Abolishing the firearms registry

The Status of Women Sector is outraged over the vote under gag rule of the draft bill on the abolition of the firearms registry. It is revolting that the current government gags the opposition in order to pass this draft bill as quickly as possible and doesn't listen to the majority of the people who want to keep the registry. In Québec, 74% of people support the registry.

In conclusion, the participation of Michèle Boisclair should be noted on

the *Syndicat de la fonction publique du Québec* (SFPQ) panel on November 25, which dealt with the difficulties to overcome and the proposed solutions to ensure a fair representation of women in the decisional structures of the FIQ.

The delegation of members from the SPFQ greatly appreciated the panel which made gave them insight into the difficulties that women have in the labour movement. ■

## ALTERNATIVE AND COMMUNITY CONFERENCE IN THE STREET

A conference, organized by the *Institut du Nouveau Monde* (INM), was held on November 2 and 3 on health. The conference was called "*La santé notre affaire à tous*". Appearing on the programme were speakers whose positions we know all too well: increase rate structuring, strengthen the user fees logic, promote the development of the private sector in health care, etc. In reaction to this conference, women's groups organized a conference in the street on November 3. Michèle Boisclair, Vice-President and Political Officer for Status of Women at the FIQ, spoke in order to denounce fees and privatization in health care.



Fiona Hanley, Professor at Dawson College and trained as a nurse

## ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND WOMEN'S HEALTH IN HOSPITALS: A LOOK AT THE RISKS

Fiona Hanley, professor of Nursing at Dawson College, presented a different look at the risks linked to environmental factors from a feminist point of view. Ms Hanley is particularly interested in the integration of environmental health in the nurses' practice.

### WHAT TO DO?

- Reduce single-use objects
- Choose reusable material
- Sort the waste
- Choose less toxic products
- Promote biological or local food
- Prioritize active means of transportation and public transit
- Encourage recycling

### PRACTICAL ADVICE:

- Avoid products whose ingredients are not marked (what the product contains is surely undesirable)
- Do not use products with unpleasant odors
- Pay more, use less
- Pay attention to free products, they often hide adverse effects
- Consume food that one can get in its raw or natural form
- Avoid material that pretends to be something it is not

More than 100,000 products are found on the market and are commonly used. So, this explains why chemical products are found everywhere. There was no law before 1981 which governed the obligation to collect data on the impact of these products on the environment and on our health. That is very disturbing.

What is even more disturbing is that children and pregnant women are more vulnerable and affected by chemical products. Many diseases can result from this: breast cancer, endometriosis, uterine fibroids, diabetes, fertility problems, cardiovascular disease, premature births, etc. A study conducted with 12 physicians and 8 nurses brought out the scope of the damage. Each individual had at least 24 toxic substances and two of them had 39 in their blood. Everyone had bisphenol A, a form of phthalates, PBDEs<sup>1</sup> and PFCs<sup>2</sup>.

The health problems among the nurses are more numerous for those highly exposed to chemical cleaning products: asthma, miscarriages and certain

cancers. Furthermore, many products containing highly toxic substances, called medical waste, are used in health-care institutions. They are not always fully regulated and tested. There is no sorting of the waste, regardless of whether it is recyclable or reusable.

Subsequently, toxins are found in the health-care system and in the environment: cleaners and disinfectants, dioxins, electronic equipment, flame-retardant products, chemical perfumes, mercury, phthalates (DEHP), polyvinyl chloride (PVC), pharmaceutical products, internal pollution, cleaning products, disinfectants, sterilizing products, latex, pesticides, etc. These products have caused several harmful effects on health: irritations of the respiratory tract, the eyes, the skin, a link with the cause and effect of asthma, hormonal disturbances, allergies, respiratory irritations, fatigue, headaches, cancer, hypersensitivity, etc. ■

1. Polybromodiphenyl ethers: construction material, automobile parts, carpet underpadding, furniture foam, electrical and electronic equipment, textiles, etc.

2. Perfluorocarbons: air conditioners, refrigeration units, fire extinguishers, food wrap, carpets, etc.

### At the microphone:

1. Sonia Mancier, CHSLD Vigi Montérégie
2. Mireille Pelchat, CSSS du Granit
3. Marjolaine Tremblay, CSSS de Charlevoix





Lise Parent, Professor at UQAM

## “HORMONAL SABOTAGE: HOW COMMONLY USED PRODUCTS THREATEN OUR HEALTH”

Endocrine disruptors? What is meant by this term? This was the subject of the presentation of Lise Parent, Professor at the *Université du Québec à Montréal* (UQAM), to the network’s activists. All around us, from leaving the house for work, in the car, endocrine disruptors are everywhere. Why are they called disruptors? Because they provoke hormonal imbalances and send harmful signals to the body.

Endocrine disruptors are material harmful to our health by disrupting the action of hormones. They can enter the body directly by way of dust particles, through hand contact, they can also be swallowed inadvertently, inhaled (vapours in the air and dust particles), etc. Endocrine disruptors are suspected of causing infertility and deformities, and also cancers, allergies, musculoskeletal and cardiovascular problems and they are of great concern to researchers.

The difficulties encountered with endocrine disruptors are numerous and complex since they are subtle. Several very weak exposures which escape traditional controls can be a concern. So, now is the time to look at developing new methods of analysis. To completely grasp the concept, researchers will have their work cut out

for them for several decades to come. What can be done to counteract the harmful effects of these disruptors absorbed by the food we eat, the homes we live in, the clothes we wear and the furniture in our houses?

### RESOURCES:

- FemmeToxic:** <[www.femmetoxic.com](http://www.femmetoxic.com)>
- Alliance of Nurses for Health Environments:** <[www.envirn.org](http://www.envirn.org)>
- Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment:** <[www.cape.ca](http://www.cape.ca)>
- Nurses and Environmental Health:** <[www.cna-aiic.ca/CNA/documents/pdf/publications/PS105\\_Nurses\\_Env\\_Health\\_e.pdf](http://www.cna-aiic.ca/CNA/documents/pdf/publications/PS105_Nurses_Env_Health_e.pdf)>
- David Suzuki Foundation:** <[www.davidsuzuki.org/](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/)>
- HealthyStuff:** <[www.healthystuff.org](http://www.healthystuff.org)>
- Toxicity and Exposure Assessment for Children's Health (TEACH):** <[www.epa.gov/teach/teachsummaries.html](http://www.epa.gov/teach/teachsummaries.html)>
- Environmental Defence Canada:** <[www.environmentaldefence.ca](http://www.environmentaldefence.ca)>
- Environmental Association of Nova Scotia - Guide to Less Toxic Products:** <[www.lesstoxicguide.ca/index.asp?fetch=personal](http://www.lesstoxicguide.ca/index.asp?fetch=personal)>
- Greenpeace Canada:** <[www.greenpeace.org/canada/fr](http://www.greenpeace.org/canada/fr)>
- Choisir notre avenir:** <[www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/11-\\_Choosing\\_our\\_future\\_FR.pdf](http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/11-_Choosing_our_future_FR.pdf)>
- Health Care Without Harm:** <[www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org)>
- Lung Association - Your Healthy Home:** <[www.yourhealthyhome.ca](http://www.yourhealthyhome.ca)>
- Practice Green Health:** <<http://cms.h2e-online.org>>
- Synergie Santé Environnement:** <[www.synergiesanteenvironnement.org](http://www.synergiesanteenvironnement.org)>
- Women's Voices for the Earth:** <[www.womensvoices.org](http://www.womensvoices.org)>

### HOW TO AVOID THEM?

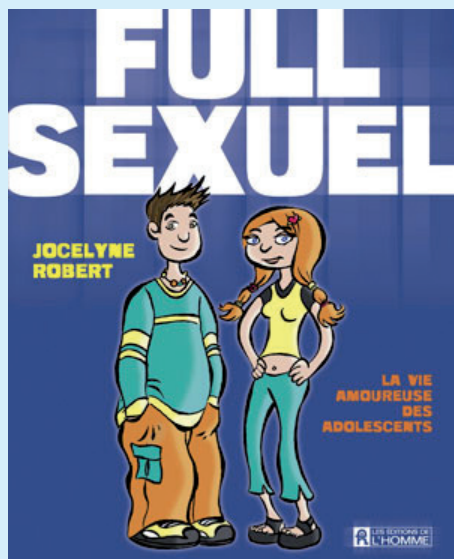
- Regular hand washing
- Avoid putting your hands in your mouth
- Dust with a damp cloth
- Ventilate the house (20 times more PBDE inside than outside, even in town)
- Be an informed shopper ■



### At the microphone:

1. Isabelle Grégoire, CSSS de la région de Thetford
2. Huguette Lajeunesse, Centre hospitalier universitaire de Sherbrooke
3. Julie Ouellet, CHA universitaire de Québec

## FAVOURITE READING OF THE NETWORK



A book by Jocelyne Robert, a sexologist and educator, who works with young people and their parents is a great discovery. A communicator, she also works on television. She has published eight successful books, including the one I am presenting to you today, “Full sexuel”. My favourite, as a mother of two boys, a woman, a healthcare professional and a feminist. It is a book that deals with the love life of teenagers, there is a chapter which tackles violence and harassment quite well to explain what is certainly not love. The theme is tackled with examples of experiences of young people in order to make them aware of respect and self confidence. It deals with subjects such as pornography, homophobia and romance with little bits of moving history. At the end of each chapter, there are fun quizzes to demystify the myths and the reality surrounding human relationships. In short, I loved this book, I gave it to my teenager as a gift in order to pass on good messages and so he will be able to develop healthy relationships in his personal life. This book is a magnificent tool for educating our children! ■

*By Véronique Foisy, member of the Status of Women Committee*

*Homo Toxicus*, a film from Carole Poliquin, is a documentary on environmental pollution and its effects on health (2008). A global experience is taking place and we are the guinea pigs. Every day, tons of toxic substances are released into the environment without us knowing the long term effects on humans. Some of them seep into our bodies and those of our children. At the same time we are passing on our genetic make-up, we are now passing on our toxic make-up to our children.

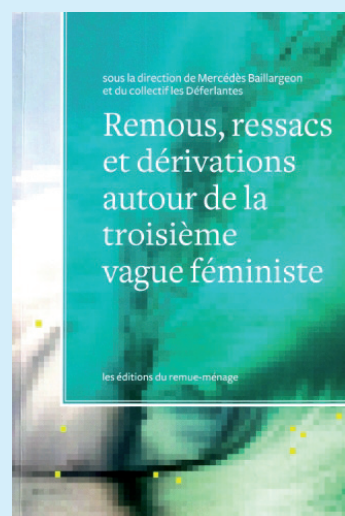
In an unpublished survey, rigorously conducted with humour from their own blood analyses, the director explores the links between these toxic substances and the increase in certain health problems such as cancers, fertility problems and hyperactivity. The conclusions are troubling. This documentary tackles serious problems of fertilization due to the chemical products in our society. Every year, the number of sperm decreases by 2%, and this, since the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. The mobility of sperm is also down while the number of abnormalities increases. Genital malformations are also increasing, undoubtedly because of pesticides. Are we about to cross the line which separates progress from self-destruction?



Carole Poliquin gives us an accessible approach with clear explanations. The findings are alarming and the experiences compelling. It is therefore regrettable that this documentary was not widely televised. ■

*Source: <www.homotoxicus.com>*

*By Caroline Flageol, member of the Status of Women Committee*



What inspires feminist studies today? Some say that feminism is no longer relevant, that equality has been attained. Yes, the feminist movement still has a role to play, it's true that the issues are not the same, but think about hypersexualization, the right to an abortion that is being threatened, prostitution, etc.

This collective work, produced under the direction of Mercédès Baillargeon and the *Les Déferlantes* collective, responds to a few questions and situates the feminist movement today. How to account for the various backgrounds which plague the category “women” and the concepts of gender identity? In what ways has feminism, as a social movement, been modified to keep up with technological,

cultural, political, social and economic changes in order to address emerging problems? What are the feminists’ concerns today?

The twelve texts making up this collective work tackle these issues, some from theoretical questions, others, from practical questions like activism. A book to have on hand! ■

*By Patricia Lajoie, member of the Status of Women Committee*