

Study Finds Phthalates, Key Additive in Vinyl, Are Contaminating Ants

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I have written before that [plastics don't belong in green building](#); one reason is that it may be an endocrine disruptor. It is mixed in to PVC to make it flexible, but is not chemically bound and can leach out. The threat is taken seriously enough that it is now [banned from childrens' toys](#).

Now a new study has found that phthalates are turning up in significant quantities in ants, whether they are housed in Derek Zoolander's Center for Ants or in phthalate-free boxes. According to [David Jolly in the New York Times Green Blog](#), Dr. Alain Lenoir found the chemical was everywhere.

All of the ants that he and his team studied were contaminated with phthalates, regardless of where the insects originated. For example, the chemical made up as much as 0.59 percent of the substances on the cuticles of ants that had just been collected in a field near Tours.

In another experiment, Dr. Lenoir's team kept the ants in the laboratory in an open plastic box that contained no phthalates. Nonetheless, the amount of the chemicals on the ants' cuticles actually increased – indicating that the phthalates were present in the air and stuck to the ants' cuticles. (The quantity of phthalates on the cuticles of ants in closed boxes did not increase).

Jolly concludes:

The long-term effects of phthalate contamination on ants is not known. But Dr. Lenoir said he had observed that the fecundity of queen ants appeared to decrease when phthalates were placed on their abdomens, and that he planned to investigate that idea further.

The [Center for Disease Control continues to say](#):

Human health effects from exposure to low levels of phthalates are unknown. Some types of phthalates have affected the reproductive system of laboratory animals. More research is needed to assess the human health effects of exposure to phthalates.

TreeHugger has covered various reports that are a little less sanguine:

[Phthalates Increase Risk of Type 2 Diabetes](#)

[Do Babies Exposed to Phthalates Have Smaller Penises?](#)

[Vinyl Flooring and Phthalates Linked to Autism in New Study](#)

The data are not conclusive, but I still cannot understand why anyone would risk having it in their house if they have a choice. Vinyl does not belong in green building, for people or ants.

