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by MERVYN DYMALLY, Assemblyman



## AB 2732: The Shop Worker Safety Act of 2004

I have introduced AB 2732—the “Shop Worker Safety Act of 2004”—to protect workplace safety and the environment by requiring purveyors of reusable cloth shop towels to affix a warning notice that the towels may have been in contact with hazardous materials.

Environmental and labor organizations have recently joined forces to address the hidden problem of “toxic” towels. These are reusable cloth shop towels provided to maintenance and factory workers, mechanics and other industry service people to clean up chemical and other spills.

A recent study shows that, even after laundering, these towels remain high in toxic chemical contaminants. Even more troubling, these “toxic” towels are typically contaminated by one customer, laundered, and returned to a different customer whose unsuspecting workers believe they

are using clean towels to wipe their hands, arms and faces.

I plan to amend my legislation to require additional sanctions, and possibly to ban the use of all re-laundered industrial cloth shop towels, if we can't arrive at a solution to clean this mess up. I have also asked California Attorney General Bill Lockyer to examine this issue to determine whether environmental laws have been broken.

This issue has dramatic implications for workers throughout the U.S. Those at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum are a particularly high risk for exposure. And, untreated wastewater from the laundering process introduces significant amounts of toxic substances into sewers adding additional environmental burdens to already overtaxed and outdated municipal sewage systems.

Even after being returned by a commercial laundry service, toxic towels contain contaminants, and sometimes-metal shav-

ings, that remain on the towels.

A recent study conducted by the Gradient Corporation found that employees who utilize 2.5 reusable shop towels per day could be exposed to lead at levels that exceed Proposition 65 limits by a factor of 26.

One way, or another, my intention is to eliminate so called “toxic towels” from the workplace in California and send a message to workers and citizens across the country that we care about their safety and the environment.

Assemblyman Dymally Chairs the Budget Subcommittee #1, Health and Human Services, and is a member of the Health Committee. He represents the 52nd Assembly District in Los Angeles which encompasses the cities of Compton, East Rancho Dominguez, Long Beach (North Long Beach), Los Angeles (South Central, Watts), Paramount, Rancho Dominguez and Willowbrook.

By KWAKU PERSON-LYNN, PH.D.