

By Kim Irwin

The link between the environment and reproductive health and upcoming legislation that could have a positive impact on both were the featured topics at the fifth annual symposium organized by the Iris Cantor-UCLA Women's Health Center. The symposium, held March 17, drew 250 health care advocates from throughout Los Angeles, hoping to take the latest information back to the county residents - mostly poor minorities – who they seek to help.

During the plenary session, panelists Kathryn Alcantar, the California policy director for the Center for Environmental Health, and Kathryn Phillips, director of the Sierra Club California, outlined what is new in climate and chemical regulation policy for 2015.

Phillips said that California leads the United States in environmental legislation, and often exceeds the goals set in climate laws. She pointed out that Assembly Bill 32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, marked a watershed moment in the state's history. The bill seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2020.

She detailed five climate-related bills symposium participants should monitor and support this year, including Senate Bill 32, which would require that 17 percent of electricity sold be acquired through renewable energy sources, and Senate Bill 3185, which would require CalPERS, the country's largest public pension fund, to no longer invest in coal by 2017.

Alcantar took participants on a “walk through their morning,” to point out exposure to chemicals found in products many people use every day, such as shampoo, deodorant and makeup, and how they made their way to the event. All these exposures, she said, add up.

Those who live by freeways or refineries or the ports, should be educated on how to lower their exposures and informed about how to read ingredients lists on their products. Exposures to chemicals found in pesticides, flame retardants, solvents and heavy metals can result in low birth weight babies and birth defects, as well as changes to DNA.

Exposure during pregnancy can be harmful as researchers found more than 200 chemicals in cord blood from infants that they tested.

“We're pre-polluting our children,” she said.

Adding to the danger is that many products commonly used today are not examined or regulated the way other products, such as pharmaceuticals, are regulated.

“The products you all used to get here today are significantly under-tested and have been proven to cause harm,” Alcantar said. “We’re guinea pigs, science experiments and we paying for it with our health, our health care costs, our taxes to fund research, and sometimes with our lives.”

Alcantar also highlights several bills that would help mitigate the dangers, including Senate Bill 193, which would create an agency to inform employees of health hazards in the workplace, and three bills that would increase disclosure of hazards posed by flame retardants, pesticides and cleaning products.

Later, participants attended one of two breakout sessions, “Community Advocacy – Advocacy for Women’s Health and the Environment: Models from the Community” or “Research – Using Existing Data Sets to Investigate Health Effects of Environmental Toxins.”

“We are fortunate to have leaders on the local and state level as conference presenters who bring a wealth of experience and information to share in addressing the goals of the conference, which include promoting research, supporting community advocacy and impacting public policy. We know that the attendees will use the knowledge they gain to educate those that need help the most on how they can reduce their exposure to toxins,” said Dr. Janet Pregler, director of the Iris Cantor-UCLA Women’s Health Center. “It’s an event that leaves everyone inspired and motivated to take action.”

Speakers and panelists at the symposium and breakout sessions represented such organizations as the Center for Environmental Health, Sierra Club California, Black Women for Wellness, Instituto de Educacion Popular del Sur de California, Pacoima Beautiful, UCLA Center for Healthier Children and the LA County Department of Public health, among others.

The event was supported in part by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Executive Advisory Board of the Iris Cantor-UCLA Women’s Health Center

Founded in 1995, the [Iris Cantor-UCLA Women’s Health Center](#) was one of the first comprehensive academic women’s health centers in the nation. It provides primary care designed exclusively for women by highly trained women physicians, and offers specialty consultations on osteoporosis, menopause, nutrition, and other women’s issues. The Center also provides free community programs on topics of particular concern to women such as heart disease, breast cancer, diabetes, and teen dating violence prevention, with a focus on underserved women and girls. On the education front, the Center has created a new women’s health curriculum for medical students at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA covering breast and ovarian cancer; the relationship of female hormones to heart disease and stroke; nutrition, diabetes, osteoporosis, contraception, and healthy aging.