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# Chasing Molecules: Poisonous Products, Human Health, And The Promise Of Green Chemistry

Chasing  
Molecules



*Poisonous Products, Human Health,  
and the Promise of Green Chemistry*

ELIZABETH  
GROSSMAN



## Synopsis

Each day, headlines warn that baby bottles are leaching dangerous chemicals, nonstick pans are causing infertility, and plastic containers are making us fat. What if green chemistry could change all that? What if rather than toxics, our economy ran on harmless, environmentally-friendly materials? Elizabeth Grossman, an acclaimed journalist who brought national attention to the contaminants hidden in computers and other high tech electronics, now tackles the hazards of ordinary consumer products. She shows that for the sake of convenience, efficiency, and short-term safety, we have created synthetic chemicals that fundamentally change, at a molecular level, the way our bodies work. The consequences range from diabetes to cancer, reproductive and neurological disorders. Yet it's hard to imagine life without the creature comforts current materials provide - and Grossman argues we do not have to. A scientific revolution is introducing products that are "benign by design," developing manufacturing processes that consider health impacts at every stage, and is creating new compounds that mimic rather than disrupt natural systems. Through interviews with leading researchers, Grossman gives us a first look at this radical transformation. Green chemistry is just getting underway, but it offers hope that we can indeed create products that benefit health, the environment, and industry.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Fascinating--All we wished were not true about the contaminants in our environment. and how little control we have over these contaminants

The author helped to clarify and expand previous information I had on the subject in more depth. This is a must read for anyone concerned about the chemical world we live in. The great gift of reading this book is the positive call for action within the ability to create global solutions to prevent further problems.

I co-authored a day-long UC Berkeley/UCLA training curriculum, *Decoding Green Chemistry for Workers*, funded by the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences. Among the scientists I consulted during development were Dr. Michael Wilson at the Berkeley Center for Green Chemistry, and Dr. Julia Quint, former Chief of HESIS (California's Hazard Evaluation System and Information Service). Both are members of California's Green Ribbon Science Panel. *Chasing Molecules* was essential in translating complex scientific information, principles, and case studies into clear, understandable, relevant, and downright fascinating material. We drew from both its language and content to design a training that brought the excitement of green chemistry to those that are among the most vulnerable population to long-term toxic chemical exposure. The workers we trained were interested and highly motivated to explore the practical applications of green chemistry after our workshop, and much of that is due to the framework provided by Grossman's book. It is a thoroughly researched work and has been instrumental in our promoting our understanding of the issue as public health professionals. Anecdotally, I spoke with a Berkeley PhD chemist specializing in green chemistry research that has personally recommended *Chasing Molecules* to both his chemist and non-chemist communities. It's an excellent resource and extremely accessible.

Elizabeth Grossman has become one of the preeminent independent science writers of our era, bringing much needed and timely insight to one of most vexing challenges of the 21st century - how to prevent the devastating and growing public and environmental health impacts of the unprecedented growth of synthetic chemicals, in our workplaces, our communities and in our bodies. In "*Chasing Molecules*" she shows us that she's done her homework and demonstrates her vast knowledge of the subject matter along with a keen intelligence that not only makes the connections visible and understandable, but does so in language that is clear and offers a clarion call for action. Ted Smith, Founder and former Executive Director of Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition; Coordinator of International Campaign for Responsible Technology; and co-author of "*Challenging the chip: labor rights and environmental justice in the global electronics industry*" - [...]

fascinating book explores substances which are hazardous to human health that interferes with biological mechanism and how it has changed the worlds chemistry of the plant. How widely used synthetics chemicals affect healthy living cells, migrating from industrial waste sites to finished products which we use everyday, furniture, textiles, electronic toys, personal use, mobile phones made up of molecules

Renowned environmental journalist Elizabeth Grossman has given us a well-researched, thoughtful, and beautifully written introduction to the emerging world of "green chemistry." In the tradition of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, *Chasing Molecules* takes the reader into the dazzling and often puzzling domain of chemical manufacturing and product-creation. Her book directly addresses questions of consumer safety and environmental concern associated with the use of dozens of products we take for granted -- plastic toys, water bottles, sunscreen, athletic shoes, computers, and much of the packaging that comes with them. Her account is sober but never polemical.

Despite what a few others have said about this book, it is not an example of uninformed advocacy journalism; rather, it is a patient, detailed account of the many pathways through which brand new chemical substances -- molecules -- enter into our bodies and into the waterways, soil, air sheds, and living tissue that surrounds us in the natural and agricultural environment. But *Chasing Molecules* does not seek to deliver another doom-and-gloom warning from the annals of old-testament environmentalism. Rather, the heart of the book is its interesting and at times inspiring investigation of "green chemistry," the nascent attempt by a number of scientists and companies to make modern products and conveniences safer and more readily digestible by ancient planetary processes. Not surprisingly, Grossman and her book remind us of the Rachel Carson saga in at least one other way as well: *Chasing Molecules* has raised the ire of a few establishment advocates who may rightly fear a book so well-written and well-researched. The book may or may not prove to be a classic in the mold of *Silent Spring*, but it surely stands among the best recent contributions to our understanding of environmental chemistry.

Doesn't seem to have a lot of fresh or deep information (still listening) and I really can't stand the narrator's strangely mechanical museum exhibit audio recording voice.

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