

The **toxic nation** Guide to Less Toxic School Supplies

Going back to school often means stocking up on a fresh batch of school supplies for the year ahead. What many parents and students don't realize is that most common school supplies are made with toxic chemicals – but luckily there are safer alternatives.

If you haven't yet finished your back to school shopping read on below for tips on less toxic school supplies. Keep these tips in mind as you refresh office and school supplies throughout the year.

School Item	Toxic Items to Avoid	Safer Alternatives
Back packs	Back packs made of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vinyl/PVC or • other synthetic materials 	Back packs made of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic cotton, • hemp, and • 100 percent post-consumer recycled rubber
Paper, notebooks and binders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bleached paper and notebooks, • vinyl binders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acid and chlorine-free paper, • hemp paper and notebooks, • post-consumer recycled corrugated cardboard binders
Pencil Case	Pencil cases made of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vinyl/PVC or • other synthetic materials 	Pencil cases made of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic/unbleached cotton and • hemp
Rulers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plastic rulers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wooden rulers
Pens and Markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pens and markers with plastic casings. • Watch out for scented markers and inks loaded with solvents (i.e. xylene) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-based markers, • certified non-toxic ink pens, • pens and markers with wood or biodegradable corn casings.
Pencils and Crayons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dusty, uncertified pencils and crayons (many pigments contain harmful substances) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-dusty and certified non-toxic pencils, crayons, oil pastels, and chalk. • Also try unpainted and FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified pencils.
Lunch containers, wraps and utensils	Plastic containers made of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PVC (#3) or • polycarbonate plastic (#7) <small>(The plastics number is usually found on the bottom of the item inside a recycle symbol.)</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tupperware and bottles made of plastics #1, 2, 4 and 5 • stainless steel thermoses, • organic cotton or hemp lunch bags
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plastic food wrap (i.e. saran wrap) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic cotton napkins, • aluminium foil, • wax paper, • food-grade reusable containers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plastic utensils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable stainless steel utensils
Lunch food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canned food • Produce and other food items treated with pesticides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh, frozen or dried food • Organic food and beverages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive amounts of animal products (major source of persistent organic pollutants – especially fish) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetarian and vegan foods (i.e. tofu wraps, veggie slice sandwiches, soy yogurt, etc.)

School Item	Toxic Items to Avoid	Safer Alternatives
Computers*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computers that contain PBDEs/ brominated flame retardants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PBDE-free computers (Many electronics companies are phasing out PBDEs, including: Apple, Dell, Fujitsu Siemens, Hewlett Packard, Hitachi, IBM, Intel, Matsushita/Panasonic, Motorola, NEC, Philips Semiconductors, Sony and Toshiba.)
Desks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formaldehyde-treated desks (most particleboard, fibreboard, and plywood contains formaldehyde) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solid wood with a non-toxic finish, metal, used furniture (but avoid painted furniture from before 1960, it may contain lead). IKEA has made a commitment to sell products that are free from hazardous substances.

*Computers contain many toxic chemicals other than PBDEs, i.e. heavy metals. There is no such thing as a toxic-free computer. Some companies are more proactive than others in finding safer alternatives to the many harmful ingredients that go into a computer.



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