Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) are toxic chemicals that adversely affect human health and the environment around the world. POPs are transported by wind, water, and food cycles. Because they are resistant to environmental degradation, they can persist for long periods of time in the environment, accumulate, and pass through the food chain.

In people, reproductive, developmental, behavioral, neurologic, endocrine, and immunologic adverse health effects have been linked to POPs. The Arctic's indigenous people are at particular risk of POPs exposure because their subsistence diets include large amounts of fish and wild foods that are high in fat and locally obtained.

These banned pollutants were created decades ago and hold testament to a less environmentally friendly past. These POPs coming in from the cold are affecting the health of today's children and will effect their children. It's a lesson in intergenerational responsibility.

POP\s were first noticed in the Arctic during the 1950s when pilots noticed a haze that was traced to the lower latitudes. The Arctic is a "sink" for certain pollutants transported into the region from distant sources.

Chemicals like PCBs and HCBs have been used as insulating materials, inks, adhesives, flame retardants, paints and paper products. Pesticides like DDT remain a valuable health tool in the tropics, but has largely been replaced in industrial use. Because of its chemical makeup, it will not decompose and has accumulated in the Arctic's sinks and wildlife.

Dioxins unintentionally produce POPs through industrial processes and combustion, for example, municipal and medical waste incineration and backyard burning of trash. Oceans and soils become primary sources of POPs after they are no longer used. POPs are carried by winds from the south and are deposited into the soil and ocean, where they accumulate.

Over 4 billion pounds of PCBs have been produced and used since 1929. More than 4 billion pounds of DDT have been produced and used since 1940. Over 150 countries have agreed to reduce or eliminate 12 key POPs in the Stockholm Convention.