Anyone who has dropped their smartphone into a sink, pool or mud puddle can recall the flash of dread that occurs when the device splashes into the water. Memories captured in videos and pictures are at risk — not to mention contact information for the most important people in our lives, and hundreds of dollars in repair or replacement fees.

Those whose phones come out of close encounters with water unscathed probably attribute the save to quick reflexes or good fortune when, in reality, they have toluene to thank. A high-quality, polyurethane sealant made from toluene by America's petrochemical manufacturers, this chemical compound is an unsung hero for modern technology, protecting our beloved smartphones and many of the high-tech devices consumers rely on each day.

From workplaces to schools and households, toluene makes our modern approaches to communication, education and entertainment possible. Not only does it protect cell phones and tablets from spilled drinks and swimming pools, this chemical compound is also key in the manufacturing of cresol, which is used extensively in the pharmaceutical industry. From disinfectants to antiseptics to keep germs at bay, cresol is a key player in helping keep our doctors' offices clean — so one trip to the pediatrician does not leave the whole family feeling under the weather.

Toluene might even give you some extra pep in your step. A key in the manufacture of thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU), toluene diisocyanate helps maintain the durable yet springy midsoles that help cushion your running shoes. The use of TPU in footwear ensures comfort and helps reduce injury, so you can be out and about all day, without feeling it.

Shifting gears, toluene also serves as an octane booster for gasoline in vehicles — increasing power and efficiency in engines — and it is commonly used in the printing and leather-tanning processes that give many vehicle seats a fine finish.

While it may not be a household name, toluene is invaluable, representing progress in so much of our everyday lives. From protecting our cell phones to advancing technology to keeping us comfortable and clean, this building block from American petrochemical manufacturers helps make our modern world possible.

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