In California, Umbrellas Prevent Cancer and Cause It

By Josh Bloom — July 12, 2020

Right now pretty much everything sucks. It can get mighty depressing, reading about COVID-19 deaths or civil unrest. So let's have some fun! A few minutes of mindless idiocy at the expense of California. Why now? Because their officials decided that my patio umbrella stand is gonna give me cancer. There's even a label to prove it. And if you act now, you'll get some really bad "artwork!"

Death comes in many forms.

Let's just say that things aren't going especially well in the US right now. COVID is scaring the hell out of people (and I'm sick of writing about it), there is civil unrest all over the place and there ain't gonna be no baseball. Or basketball (they just don't realize it yet).

So, let's instead have some fun instead at the expense of California's Proposition 65, perhaps the biggest joke of a law that you will ever see. (I have had some fun with Prop 65 in the past. For example, See Should California Put A Warning Label On Your Penis? [1] or When Crazy Meets Crazier: California Wants To Label Tylenol A Carcinogen [2]. Also, my esteemed colleague, Dr. Alex Berezow, takes a shot at the law here [3].)

The inspiration behind today's relentlessly stupid article comes from (what doesn't?) Amazon – a (presumably) harmless patio umbrella, delivered in two boxes. But, a patio umbrella isn't merely harmless; it's actually healthy. Less sunlight, less melanoma. A win-win, right?
Not in California. If any chemical or material has any chance of being carcinogenic (there are about 800 chemicals on this insane list) it needs to "warn" you with this stupid label...

![Prop 65 Warning for CA Residents](image)

Here are a few of the carcinogens and reproductive toxins on the list: alcohol, aspirin, Valium, marijuana smoke, nickel, Chinese-style salted fish, and wood dust. You get it. We're all doomed. Which no doubt explains the surge in cancer cases in the US over the past 40 years.

![Incidence of cancer (all sites) by year](image)

Incidence of cancer (all sites) by year. Source: Actual and Projected Cancer Incidence Rates, United States, 1975 to 2020 (CDC)

Oops. Never mind. There isn't any increase.

Back to the umbrella. Here is the label on the umbrella box. Looks harmless enough, although the artist's rendering of a patio may need a little work.
But here's the label on the box with the stand. Quite different.

Which brings up two basic problems:

1. I don't especially want to get cancer.
2. Although largely under control, my habit of chewing on umbrella stands sometimes gets the better of me.

What to do?

So, I've got a serious problem on my hands. I want to protect myself from carcinogenic UV radiation but how can I do so without using the cancer stand? I did come up with a few possible solutions, but so far, they haven't worked out too well...
Idea #1 - Order wife to hold the umbrella over me.

In hindsight, this was probably not such a great idea. It resulted in two different sequelae, both unsatisfactory:

(I know with absolute certainty that I'm gonna regret publishing this someday.)

Sequela #1:

And then...

Sequela #2:

Idea #2 - Hold the thing myself.

This, too, resulted in a suboptimal outcome.
Dr. Bloom, a chemist of sartorial splendor, tries an experiment. It fails.

Idea #3 - Get a big, lazy dog. Tie umbrella to dog.

This seemed to work at first...
But then, the design flaws became evident once a breeze picked up...

Do you see how stupid this is? That umbrella stand has the same chance of giving anyone cancer as I do taking a bubble bath with Susan B. Anthony in Macy's window on July 32nd. Because of the banning of lead paint and leaded gasoline, blood lead levels have dropped like a rock in the last 60 years in the US. We are far safer from lead poisoning than ever before. With the exception of umbrella stands, I guess.

Source: Blood lead levels, 1960-present. Source: Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

No, the stupid umbrella stand isn't going to do anything to me whatsoever, yet if a California manufacturer or business, large or small, inadvertently fails to slap on a worthless label on a perfectly safe product they will pay dearly, thanks to the vipers bounty-hunting lawyers who
enforce Prop 65 by use of predatory lawsuits that benefit no one except themselves. What a joke. Perhaps there's a better place to shove that umbrella.

Keep your sunny side up and enjoy the summer.


Links
[1] https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/06/03/should-california-put-a-label-on-your-penis