Science Panel Finds that Teflon-Production Chemical Does Not Pose Health Risk to General Population

By ACSH Staff — March 18, 2005

A review by scientists associated with the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) has found no likely risk to human health associated with the levels of PFOA (perfluorooctanoic acid) to which the general population is exposed. The review disputes the claims by some journalists, litigators, and environmentalists that people are at risk from PFOA in the environment.

ACSH's extensive review of the literature about PFOA is summarized in the new booklet, Teflon and Human Health: Do the Charges Stick? [1] (based on a longer peer-reviewed ACSH position paper). PFOA is a chemical involved in the production of products such as Teflon, and trace amounts of it have been found in the blood of people around the world.

While very high doses of PFOA can cause harmful effects in laboratory animals, the typical human population including those in areas near factories that use PFOA is exposed to only very small amounts of PFOA. These amounts are hundreds to thousands of times lower than levels that cause harmful effects in animals.

Furthermore, as the report discusses, some of the biological mechanisms by which PFOA causes effects in lab animals may not even be present in humans. Studies of workers who are highly exposed to PFOA also do not demonstrate that PFOA is linked to negative human health effects.

Because of concerns about PFOA, some critics have also expressed concern about potential health effects from using Teflon products themselves. However, PFOA is used in manufacturing Teflon but isn't present in the final product. Instead, the report states, humans are probably exposed to PFOA mainly through drinking water in minuscule, harmless amounts.

This is another example of the classic principle that the dose makes the poison, says Dr. Gilbert Ross, ACSH medical director. Our report shows that the scientific evidence does not indicate any reason for us to fear PFOA at current levels.