

The New Litigation Against Teflon Won't Stick

By ACSH Staff — July 19, 2005

Only in America: today, a group of Florida attorneys filed a \$5 billion class action suit against DuPont claiming that the company has for decades failed to notify consumers of the health risks posed by "Teflon chemicals."

The plaintiffs want DuPont to spend \$5 billion to replace the cookware that is allegedly dangerous and provide medical monitoring for the plaintiffs who used the cookware. The suit also demands that Teflon-coated products in the future carry health warning labels.

The suit charges that the "Teflon chemical" PFOA is a "carcinogen" -- defined here as a chemical that causes cancer in rodents.

This lawsuit and its charges are ludicrous on two different levels:

First, PFOA, a chemical used to create Teflon, poses no known hazard to human health. Myriad chemicals -- both of natural and synthetic origin -- are carcinogenic when fed at high doses to rodents. Such laboratory observations are of no relevance in predicting human cancer risk.

Second, Teflon-coated cookware does not even contain PFOA.

So the lawsuit is based on the allegation of a risk that is not a risk. And this nonrisk does not even exist in the targeted products (Teflon cookware).

It is easy these days to scare consumers by telling them that there are invisible, nefarious, chemical components seeping into their air, water, food, and consumer products. Indeed, the publicity around this lawsuit may cause considerable anxiety among consumers, who get only one take home message: cancer-causing chemicals in my pots and pans are putting me and my family at risk.

There is no scientific basis to support such an anxiety. Teflon cookware poses no known health risk -- and the chemicals used to produce it (which do not show up in the final product) are themselves safe.

Ever since DuPont's Dr. Roy J Plunkett accidentally discovered Teflon in his laboratory in 1938, it has proven to be an extremely useful substance. It was first used in machine and military applications in the 1940s and dramatically changed cooking and cleanup in the 1960s when used as a nonstick surface for pots and pans. It is the success story of Teflon that makes it such a ripe target for those who spew chemical-phobia in their campaign to eliminate the tools that modern industrial chemistry has given us (pesticides, pharmaceuticals, food additives, and more).

Let's hope that the trumped-up charges against Teflon do not pan out in court. But don't count on it. Those in the environmental camp, who still tenaciously argue that a rodent is a little man, could

insist that all such "carcinogens" be purged no matter what the cost -- even when the "carcinogen" is not there.

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See also: ACSH's report [Teflon and Human Health: Do the Charges Stick?](#) ^[1]

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