Soy Many Scares, Soy Little Time

By ACSH Staff — January 4, 2006

Soy worsens heart disease! Or at least, that's what all the papers would be saying today if soy were an industrial chemical, or even a pesticide. A study published in the Journal of Clinical Investigation found that soy-filled diets increased the likelihood of heart disease -- in certain male mice.

Reports by Reuters [1] and others on the study emphasized scientists' cautions that the study has no clear implications for humans -- but the same could be said for virtually every chemical scare that makes headlines, based as they are upon high-dose rodent studies with little relevance to ordinary-dose human exposures. Reporters, politicians, and regulators automatically fall in line to condemn the latest purported threat (as gauged solely by rodent tests) from industry, but when the "threat" is just as "real" -- and comes from nature -- society moves quietly onward, unperturbed.

If the precautionary principle [2] (by which environmentalists decree [3] that no substance should be used [4] if it shows even the slightest potential for harm) and EPA regulations (such as the ones inspiring ACSH's recent petition) were applied to nature as readily as to manmade products [5], we'd have to ban half the molecules on the planet.

Not only environmental activists but most people who shop at Whole Foods Markets [6] or similar stores will tell you that there is a chance that non-organic products could be harmful -- and that until they have proof otherwise, it's "better to be safe than sorry" and so they will avoid the mainstream food. To be intellectually consistent -- however foolish -- these shoppers and the organic stores themselves would have to immediately pull all soy products off the market until we have 100% proof that this one animal study doesn't apply to humans.

But nature is in, industry is out, and soy [7] will no doubt get a free ride from the people who usually serve as scaremongers.

Jeff Stier, Esq., makes a mean tofu stir fry and is an associate director of the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH.org [8], HealthFactsAndFears.com [9]).